EELS • FIERY FURNACES • M. WARD • PERNICE BROTHERS

MAGNET

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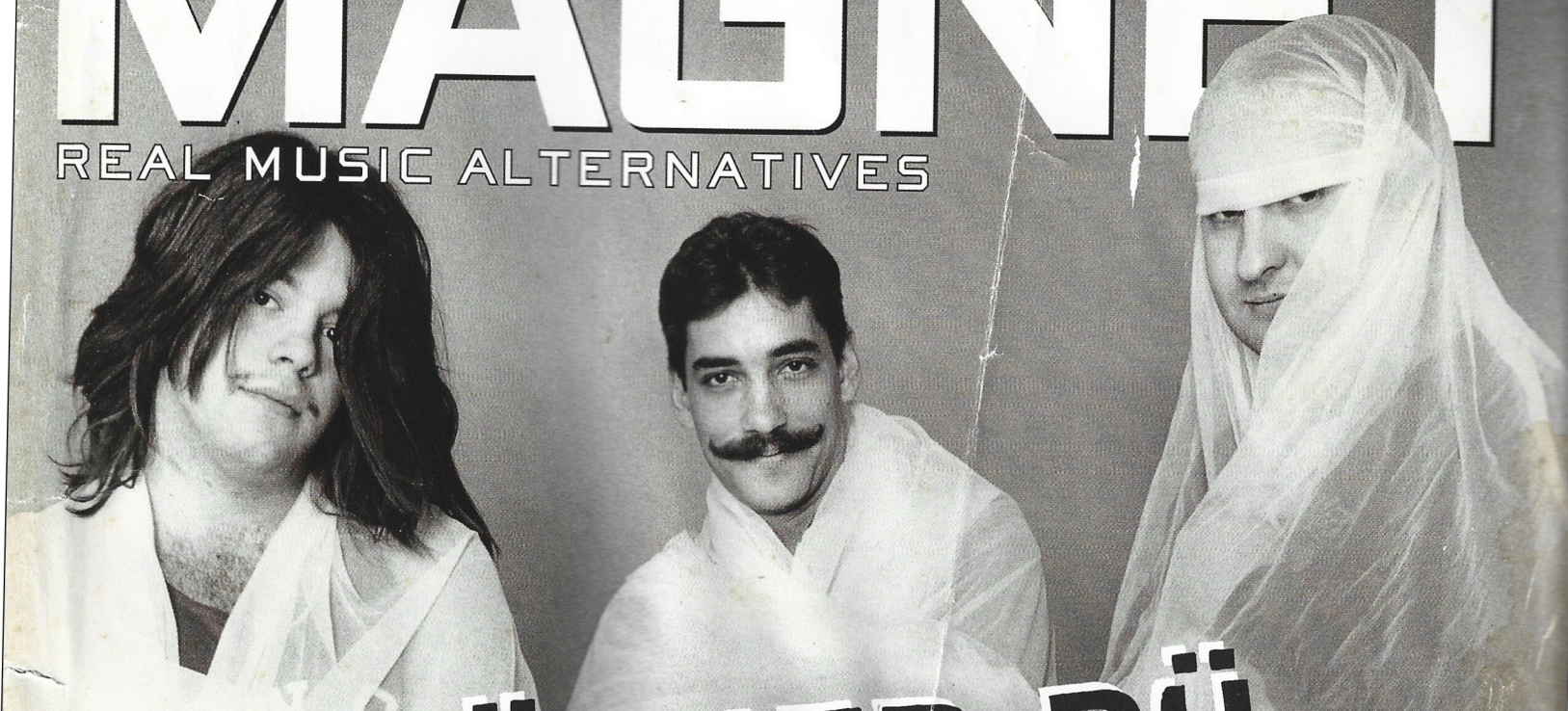

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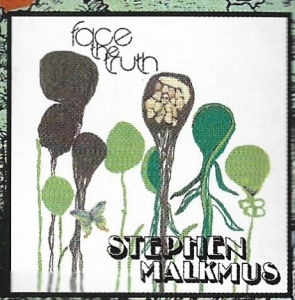

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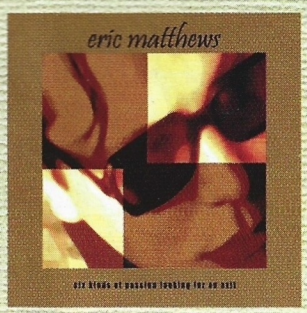

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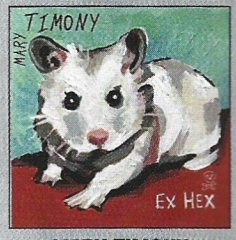
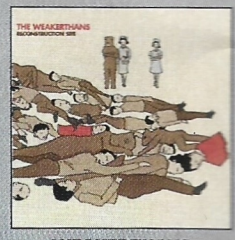


MARY TIMONY
Ex Hex
[Lookout!]

ANIMAL COLLECTIVE
Prospect Hummer
[Fatcat]



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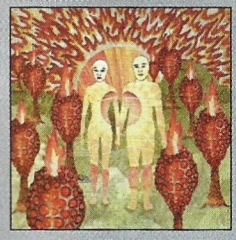

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(REAL MUSIC ALTERNATIVES)

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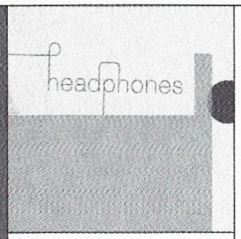
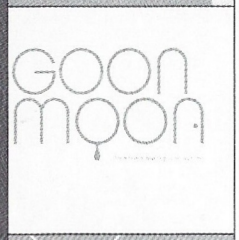
Cooler Than Jesus

Cover photo of Hüsker Dü by Greg Helgeson; contents photo of the Replacements by Daniel Corrigan



Headphones
"Headphones"
CD/LP



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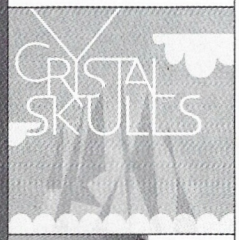
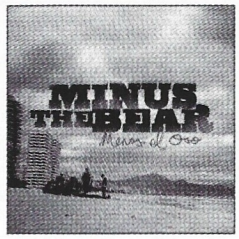


Crystal Skulls
"Blocked Numbers"
CD

Hella
"Church Gone Wild/Chirpin' Hard"
2XCD



Coming Aug 23rd 2005
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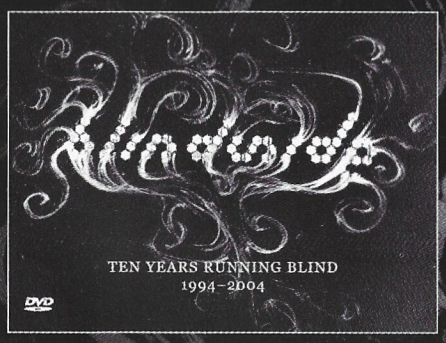

Date	Venue	Market
22-Jun	Clay's Park	Lawrence, OH
23-Jun	Jillian's	Louisville, KY
24-Jun	The Underground	Cincinnati, OH
25-Jun	Club Tundra	Syracuse, NY
27-Jun	Knitting Factory	New York, NY
28-Jun	Axis	Boston, MA
29-Jun	Saratoga Winners	Latham, NY
30-Jun	Downtown	Farmingdale, NY
1-Jul	Theatre Of The Living Arts	Philadelphia, PA
2-Jul	The Buffalo Icon	Buffalo, NY
5-Jul	The Intersection	Grand Rapids, MI
6-Jul	St. Andrew's Hall	Detroit, MI
7-Jul	Emerson Theatre	Indianapolis, IN
8-Jul	Logan Square Auditorium	Chicago, IL
9-Jul	LifeFest @ Sunnyview Expo Center	OshKosh, WI
11-Jul	Club 3 Degrees	Minneapolis, MN
12-Jul	Sokol Underground	Omaha, NE
14-Jul	Mississippi Nights	St. Louis, MO
15-Jul	Juanita's	Little Rock, AR
16-Jul	Music Hall	Fayetteville, AR
17-Jul	Granada Theatre	Lawrence, KS
18-Jul	Bluebird Theatre	Denver, CO
21-Jul	The Venue	Boise, ID
22-Jul	Fat Tuesday's Concert Hall	Spokane
23-Jul	El Corazon	Seattle, WA
24-Jul	Meow Meow	Portland, OR
27-Jul	Club Retro	Orangevale, CA
28-Jul	Slim's	San Francisco, CA
29-Jul	Spirit West Coast Laguna Seca	Selinas, CA
31-Jul	Whisky A Go Go	W. Hollywood, CA
4-Aug	The Clubhouse	Tempe, AZ
6-Aug	The Door	Dallas, TX
7-Aug	The Wherehouse	Bartlesville, OK
14-Aug	The Social	Orlando, FL
16-Aug	Green Street	Greensboro, NC
19-Aug	Purple Door Festival	Lewisberry, PA

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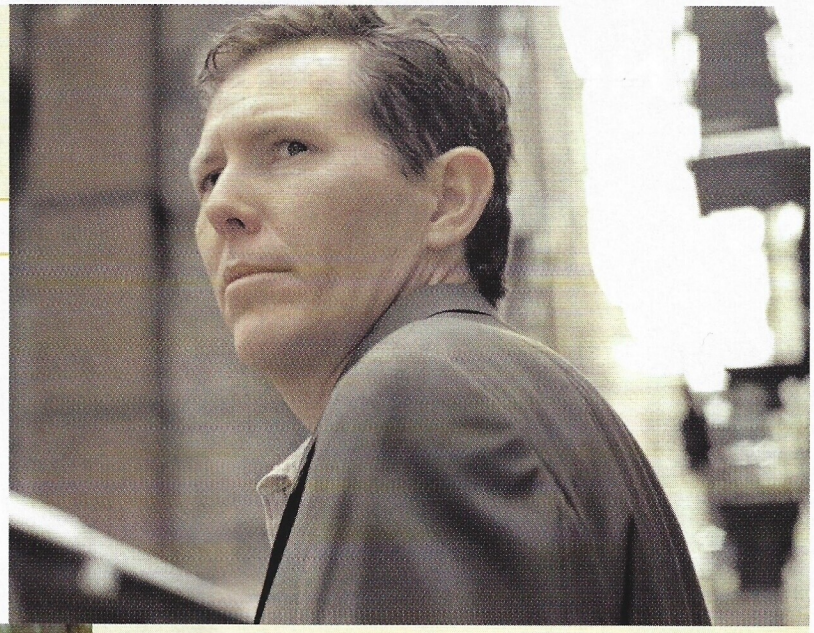
Countrier Than Thou
If They Could Only See Me Now
I Never Did Like Planes
Each Night I Try
Doin' Right (For All The Wrong Reasons)
You Don't Want What I Have
Right On Redd
Goodbye, Cruel Girl

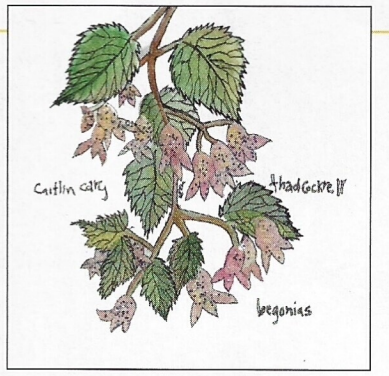
Georgia Hard

After several years out of the spotlight, Robbie's back with a new album for country fans who wonder where their music went. ***Georgia Hard*** harkens back to the old-style country of Roger Miller and the writing style of Shel Silverstein; it's rude, funny and soulful.

[PREVIEW MUSIC AT YEPROC.COM]



CAITLIN CARY & THAD COCKRELL



Begonias

On ***Begonias***, CAITLIN CARY (Whiskeytown, Tres Chicas) and THAD COCKRELL hook up to add another great album to the Music City's rich tradition of classic duet recordings. Recorded in Nashville with co-producer Brad Jones.

[PREVIEW MUSIC AT YEPROC.COM]

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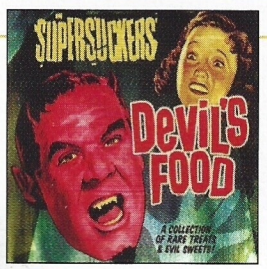

Devil's Food

"*Devil's Food* is a collection of hard to find or previously unavailable material: singles, never before released demos, and country versions of some of our most popular rock songs and some defy description altogether!"
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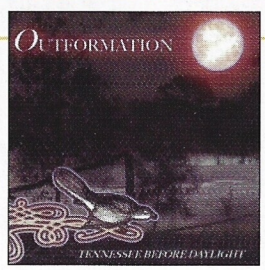
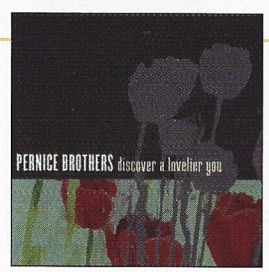


Tennessee Before Daylight

OUTFORMATION has shared the stage with such luminaries as Jojo Hermann (Widespread Panic), Luther Dickinson (North Mississippi Allstars), and more. Produced by JoJo Hermann, who also plays keyboard on the album.
FORYOUROUTFORMATION.COM

PERNICE BROTHERS



Discover a Lovlier You

12 Joe Pernice originals, evoking and inspired by transportation catastrophes, George Harrison, O. Henry, Claire Danes, Ennio Morricone and other fascinating Italians and non-Italians. Despite all the outside influences, Pernician flourishes abound. These are Joe's best songs to date.
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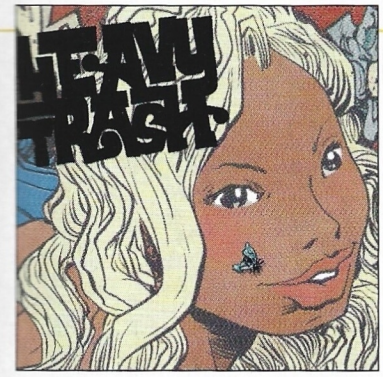
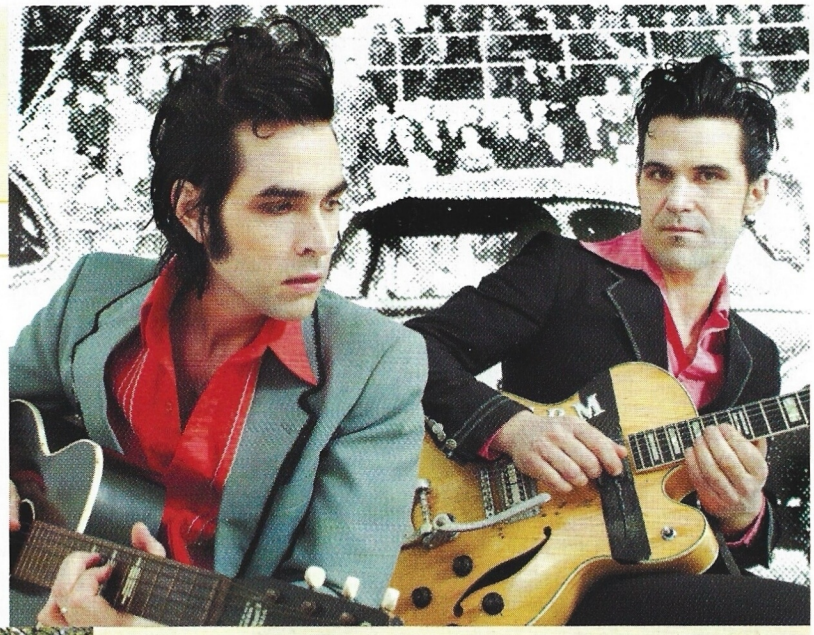
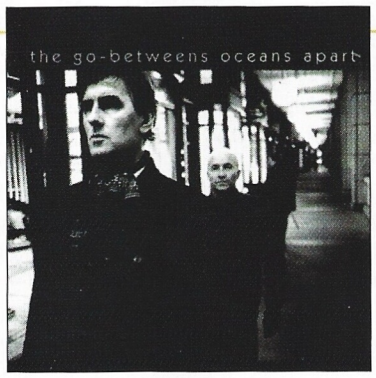


Heavy Trash

JON SPENCER and **MATT VERTA-RAY** are **HEAVY TRASH**. Dirty guitars, bad dreams, murder ballads and lust gone wrong, **HEAVY TRASH** is the perfect soundtrack for boozy all-night throw downs, pettin' parties and psychedelic fright shows. The NOW SOUND of Rock-A-Billy!
[PREVIEW MUSIC AT YEPROC.COM]



THE GO-BETWEENS



Oceans Apart

THE GO-BETWEENS are the quintessential cult band, crafting the sort of lovely, eloquent music "Lou Reed could have written if he had fallen for Brian Wilson, not David Bowie" (The Guardian). And Rolling Stone says, "There is no group of this generation writing and recording music of this class and quality."
[PREVIEW MUSIC AT YEPROC.COM]

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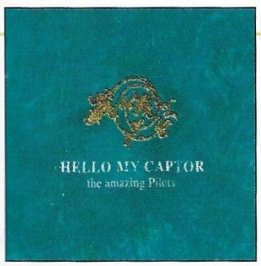
THE AMAZING PILOTS



Hello My Captor

Hello My Captor is the stateside debut from Dublin Ireland's **THE AMAZING PILOTS**. Brothers Phil and Paul Wilkinson create eleven tracks of tear-jerking, heart-tugging, brain-teasing, genre-bending pop that will have you humming for days.
WWW.UNDERTOWMUSIC.COM

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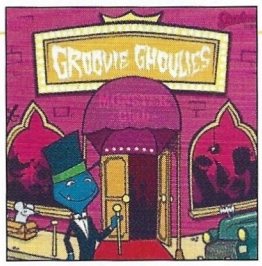
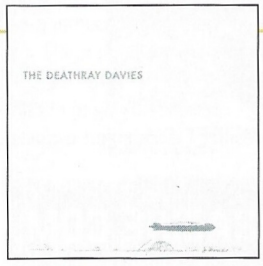


Monster Club

Fresh new recordings of rare, out-of-print and fan favorite songs, **MONSTER CLUB** also features a brand new recording, the Godzilla homage "Lizard King" which pits the King of the Monsters against Jim Morrison!
WWW.GROOVIE-GHOULIES.COM

DEATHRAY DAVIES



The Kick and the Snare

THE DEATHRAY DAVIES have earned write-ups in Esquire and People, and video-play on MTV2. *The Kick And The Snare*, is a big, immediate album so drenched in pop intuition and savvy arrangements that if radio still played rock 'n roll, it could be a generation soundtrack.
WWW.GLURP.COM

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(Letters)

Dig Me Not

I just got through reading the "interview" with Sleater-Kinney conducted by Eddie Vedder [issue #67], and I can tell you it will be a long time before I pick up your magazine again. This odious love fest was unchallenging, uninteresting and uninformative. Who could possibly be engaged in a conversation where each party verbally fellates the other? I'm a fan of both bands, but all concerned sounded like sycophantic assholes. The most heated this piece got was a lukewarm interlude over whether they would do an iPod commercial. They didn't even seriously debate the issue for fear of offending each other. This—coupled with a megastar like Vedder moaning he isn't on an indie label like Sub Pop—made for one of the most vomitous reading experiences I've had in some time. Thanks for 15 minutes I'll never get back.

Doug Halsey
New York, NY

Dammit, Eddie Vedder! "Music to be Republican by"? It's bad enough that everybody making good records thinks that I'm either a corporate stooge, a redneck religious zealot or someone who failed to "educate" myself and "vote properly." It's certainly annoying the only musicians who vote Republican are people like Jessica Simpson and Britney Spears, but that's not my fault. For the record, my "music to be Republican by" is exactly the music covered in MAGNET. Am I allowed to hold a different political view from the cool kids? While we're at it, can we just stop bickering about this crap until at least March 2008? Other than that, I thought the Sleater-Kinney interview was really great, especially the question to Corin Tucker about nurturing songs and children at the same time.

Todd Thurman
Lakewood, OH

Pro Bono

So Phil Sheridan purchased two "shitty" seats for a U2 concert and, as a result, MAGNET readers are subjected to a full-page diatribe about the whole affair [The Back Page, #67]? Here's a helpful hint, Phil: Next time you find yourself stuck in an unsatisfying consumer purchase, complain to someone who can actually do something about the problem. After having experienced a similarly frustrating experience trying to obtain tickets through the U2 presale, I exchanged e-mails with Ticketmaster and U2.com. Three days later, a Ticketmaster representative called me with two floor tickets to the show. It pays to be your own advocate, not your own martyr.

Blake Hoel
St. Louis, MO

While I agree overall with Sheridan's resentment toward re-released albums, his essay makes an egregious error when it comes to Wilco's reissue of *A Ghost Is Born*. The fact of the matter is that fans who purchased the initial release were allowed to download all of the new tracks for free at the band's Web site. The terrible irony of Sheridan's mistake is that he picked on a band that's notoriously generous with its fans. Sheridan ought to have used Wilco as a model exception to, not an example of, his argument.

Eric Beltmann
West Bend, WI

Sleater-Kinney

Face The Truth

Quibbling with reviews is generally a hollow exercise. It is, after all, just one person's opinion versus another's. But Hobart Rowland's review of Jack Logan's *Nature's Assembly Line* [#67] is flawed. Rowland states Logan hasn't released an album in five years and suggests he sounds tentative back before the mic. What about 2001's *Monkey Paw* and 2002's *Woodshedding*? OK, so maybe three years is a long time, too. But hey, I'm quibbling.

Pete Ludwig
Greendale, WI

Thanks so much for Kimberly Chun's article on Mark Robinson and Teenbeat Records [#67]. Robinson has had a distinct influence on the music scene for 20 years. Having been in a band on his label, I can say the man is a straight-up person and fun to hang with. I just wonder why no mention was made of Teenbeat's four-day, 20th-anniversary event this February. It was quite a party, with an Unrest reunion, Versus and many great performers. I'd also like to add, as a former member of Vomit Launch, that we were not a "hardcore" band by any stretch of the imagination. If anything, we were possibly post-punk or something. Nice to see journalists still judge a band by its name.

Larry Crane
Portland, OR

In her review of Damien Jurado's *On My Way To Absence* [#67], Tizzy Asher correctly points out that Jurado's religious faith is rarely the focus of his work. Yet Asher can't seem to get past it. In the course of the review, she brings up Jurado's religion three times (probably more often than he ever has), seemingly just to make sure everyone knows she doesn't share it. Don't worry: No one is going to assume Asher is a scary, holy-rollin' Jesus freak just because she gives Jurado a good review. She can still sit with the cool kids at lunch.

Brad Reno
Edwardsville, IL

I just read your interesting article about Michael Gira [#67]. Please do something similar on the subject of Tom Verlaine. I'm sure I don't have to convince you of the importance and influence of Verlaine and his band, Television. The latest crop of young groups starting with the Strokes and continuing with Franz Ferdinand obviously owes a large debt to the sound stylings of Verlaine, as do more established artists such as R.E.M., U2 and even Sleater-Kinney.

Russell Van Rooy
Portland, OR

Corrections

Issue #67: We misquoted a lyric in the review of Eric Matthews' *Six Kinds Of Passion Looking For An Exit*; the correct line from "Cardinal Is More" is "You said I hated you, but it just wasn't true." Also, Merge Records was mistakenly credited with releasing Matt Elliott's *Drinking Songs*; the album has not been issued in the U.S.

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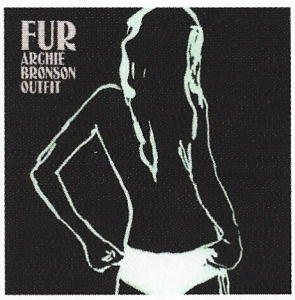

ARCHIE BRONSON OUTFIT
Fur

"A pulsating 10 tracker that expertly drives along trails blazed by Sabbath, Canned Heat, Sonic Youth, and scores of bluesmen. It's primal stuff, propelled by big drum sounds and urgent vocals. They achieve slowness with finesse." - The Independent. Produced by Hotel from the Kills.

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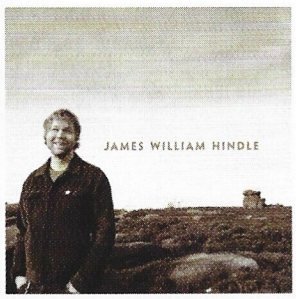

JAMES WILLIAM HINDLE
Town Feeling

On James William Hindle's third full-length album, there are the same wistful, delicately strummed melodies strewn with hope and acoustic longing that garnered critical praise for his album *Prospect Park*. He is ably joined by members of Vetiver, Currituck Co., Espers and The Ladybug Transistor.

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VARIOUS ARTISTS
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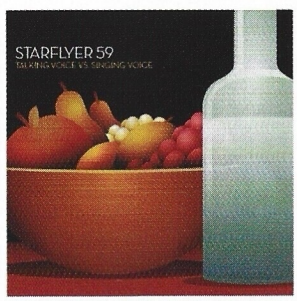

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For Starflyer 59, longevity and quality go hand-in-hand. Since 1993, Jason Martin's haunting vocal display perfectly accompanies the atmospheric mood set by the dreamy guitar lines, creating a sort of glimmering magic that could only come from such experience.

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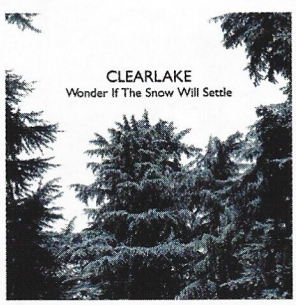
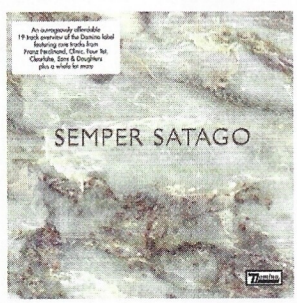


CLEARLAKE
Wonder If The Snow Will Settle

Seven-track EP featuring rare b-sides and remixes from *Cedars*. These tracks have never been made available in the US until now. New album *Amber* produced by Steven Osborne (New Order, The Doves, US) coming this fall.

DOMINO RECORDS



VARIOUS ARTISTS
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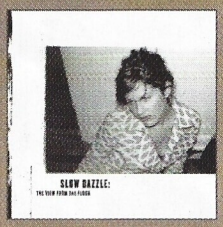
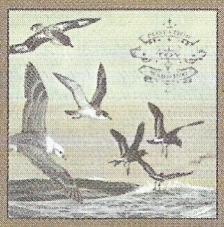


Slow Dazzle
"The View From the Floor"

Featuring two-thirds of the songwriting trio behind the acclaimed Mendoza Line, Slow Dazzle is equally rooted in classic songs. An urbanization of their previous band's pastoral tendencies, Slow Dazzle draws inspiration from great folk icons like Leonard Cohen, Lou Reed, John Cale and Nico's post-Velvets material, while adding layers of electronic sound and newfound production techniques to their pop song recipe.

Phosphorescent
"Aw Come Aw Wry"

"Raw and passionate like Palace's *Viva Last Blues* and epic like Neutral Milk Hotel's *In the Aeroplane Over the Sea*, the album works best when you sing along at the top of your lungs" *Ripsawnews.com*



Flotation Toy Warning
"Bluffers Guide to the Flight Deck"

With one foot in the eyebrow-raising pop experiments of Van Dyke Parks, Scott Walker, the Dreamies, and Curt Boettcher, and the other foot planted firmly alongside such modern-day avant-pop practitioners as the Flaming Lips, Divine Comedy or the Unicorns, Flotation Toy Warning blend found sounds, electronics, a mix of homemade and traditional instruments and lush production.

Shearwater
"Thieves"

"They remain, in parts, as somber still as American Music Club, but now add more than a dash of *Spirit of Eden*-Talk Talk and a whole heap of 70s FM pop. Soft rock chamber music if you will... Like Devendra Banhart or Iron & Wine, Shearwater are capable of emotional resonance through the most brittle of arrangements. Stunning" **** *Uncut*

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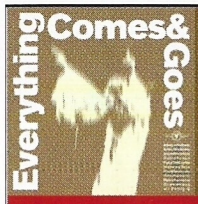

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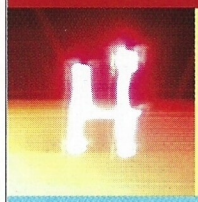

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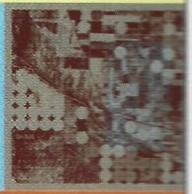

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↑ MARY TIMONY
Girl In Da Corner
page 20

"They'd see us coming in our goofy goth getups with this weird pop-music tape, and they wouldn't touch us with a 10-foot pole." —Posies, page 22

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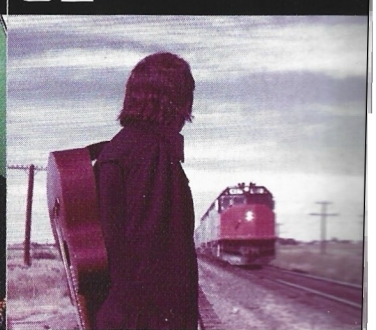
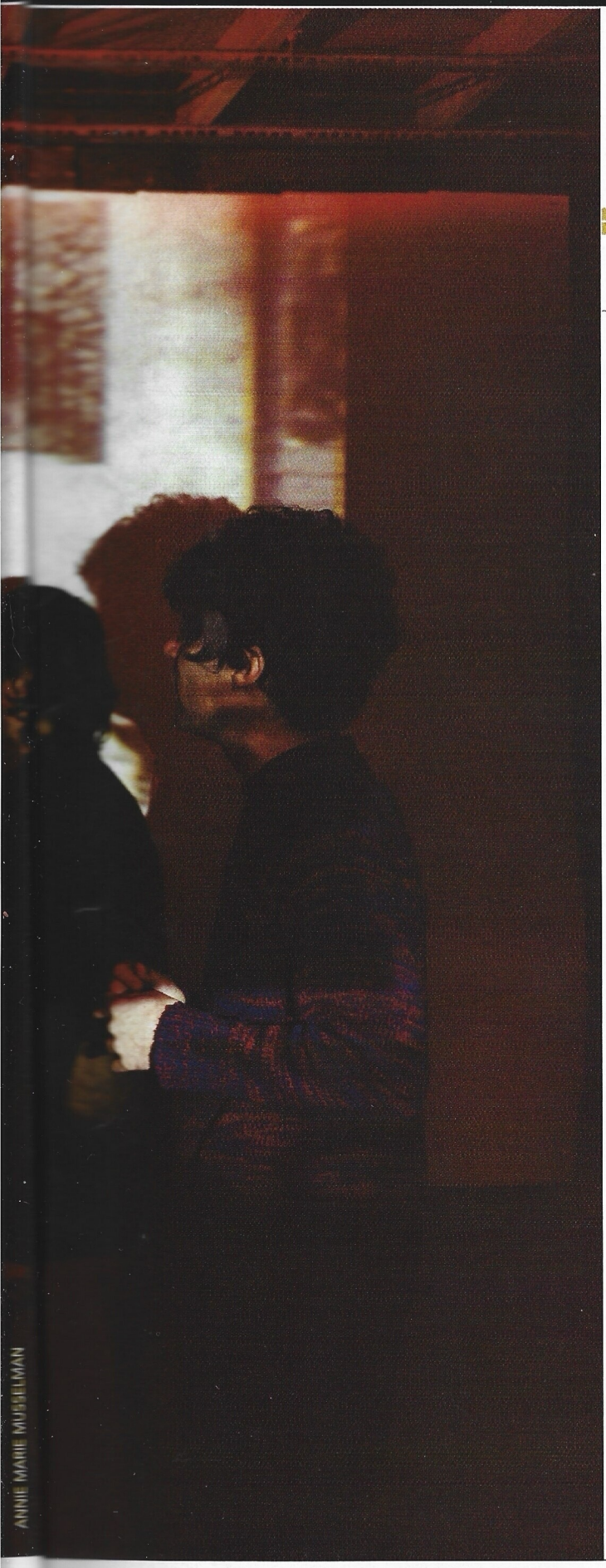


NICHOLAS BURNHAM (MARY TIMONY), ANNE MARIE MUSSELMAN (ANIMAL COLLECTIVE)

(l-r): Josh Dibb, Brian Weitz, Noah Lennox, Dave Portner

ANNIE MARIE MUSSELMAN



ANNIE MARIE MUSSELMAN

Chaos Theory

(Unmasking ANIMAL COLLECTIVE)

If ditching Halloween festivities and hanging up masks can be considered a rite of passage for American youth, Animal Collective is on the road to maturity. The four-man group, which traces its roots back to the '90s when its members played together as high-school kids in rural Maryland, has mostly abandoned the masks that once were a staple of its live show.

"We get pretty altered onstage, but not through drugs," says Josh Dibb, shaking off speculation that's no doubt fueled by Animal Collective's occasional whiff of psychedelia. "In the beginning, wearing a mask let me stop focusing on myself. But now a mask doesn't seem necessary to do that."

"We never wanted it to be some kind of gimmick," adds Dave Portner, who, like his brothers in song, also goes by a stage name. (His is Avey Tare, Dibb's is Deaken.) "Anyway, we come off strange enough without any of that stuff."

That's putting it mildly for a group that shows such abandon in concert its members usually can't be bothered to stop between songs. "We get so wrapped up in what we're doing that it wouldn't make sense to stop," says Dibb. Portner and Dibb, along with Noah Lennox (Panda Bear) and Brian Weitz (Geologist), go ritualistic in a live setting, chanting, dancing, screaming, playing rhythmic games and stretching their songs' loose structures. Animal Collective cares about response, and any reaction will do. (After one gig, a woman compared AC to a band of "retarded kids," which Dibb took as a compliment.)

But like most public madness worth paying attention to, there's a method behind it: What often sounds chaotic and spontaneous is, in fact, rarely improvised. Willful provocation and perverted pop sensibilities make Animal Collective resemble an earthy/crunchy Throbbing Gristle. But this has more to do with AC's spirit than its sound. Try to cage Animal Collective or clamp it with the bear trap of a genre association and it'll slip, charm or chew its way out every time. That's the nature of a beast that has released five wildly different studio albums over the past five years, starting with pop trip *Spirit They're Gone, Spirit They've Vanished* in 2000. The constant change also means Animal Collective almost never plays songs it has already committed to record.

"Whenever we're making a record, it's supposed to be a reflection of our lives at that moment," says Weitz. "It wouldn't really mean anything for us to play old songs because they don't reflect what's going on in our lives."

Even AC's lineup exists in flux (which is why it's a "collective," not a "band"), shifting to encompass whoever's available (the once Brooklyn-based group is now spread out, with Dibb couch-surfing around New York, Portner still in Brooklyn, Lennox in Portugal and Weitz in Washington, D.C.) and who's getting along. This setup demands versatility from its members, though their onstage roles are relatively static: Dibb and Portner play guitar and sing, Lennox drums and sings, and Weitz manipulates recorded loops via MiniDisc. All four haven't appeared together on a full-length since 2003's *Here Comes The Indian* (though all took part in this year's *Prospect Hummer* EP, a collaboration with resurrected '60s folkie Vashti Bunyan). That will change when the group releases its next album, *Feels*, in October.

Recorded in Seattle in March with Sun City Girls engineer/producer Scott Colburn, *Feels* sports songs that have gestated for more than a year. Dibb and Weitz stress the melodic nature of the mostly electric album, but in the world of Animal Collective, nothing is that straightforward. In contrast to his comrades, Portner notes the songs' structures are odd compared to last year's largely acoustic *Sung Tongs*, arguably Animal Collective's most accessible effort.

The band members at least agree on one thing: Just as you could hear their interpersonal strife on *Here Comes The Indian*, you can hear their harmony on *Feels*.

"We refer to it as the 'love record' sometimes," says Portner. "It's really important for all of us to be around each other when we can. It becomes more special because we're not together all the time anymore."

"Where we are now is the best place that we've ever been," says Weitz. "We take what we do very seriously and work really hard, but I think most of the time we're just laughing with each other."

—*Rich Juzwiak*

Sunshine Band

(OF MONTREAL Dances In The Street)

(l-r) Matt Dawson, Kevin Barnes, Bryan Poole, Jason NeSmith, Dottie Alexander, James Huggins

Kevin Barnes drives the van. If there were one definitive statement to be made about whimsical indie-pop outfit Of Montreal, that would be it. Barnes prefers to be in the driver's seat because he likes being in control, and the Athens, Ga., band—multi-instrumentalists Brian Poole, James Huggins, Dottie Alexander, Matt Dawson and Jason NeSmith—certainly sees no detriment in Barnes' fastidiousness.

"It's not so bad to have the lead singer doing the driving," laughs Huggins. "It's like the king washing the peasants' feet."

Barnes composed, arranged, engineered, produced and mixed Of Montreal's seventh and latest album, *The Sunlandic Twins* (Polyvinyl). It's a loosely conceptual, David Bowie-esque record about dualities set to an electro/disco beat. While the conceptual aspect of the LP is nothing new (Of Montreal was peripherally associated with the Elephant 6 during the psych/rock collective's heyday), the electronic and dance elements are of a more recent vintage.

"The one thing that can be said of Of Montreal is that the group is never, ever middle of the road," says Huggins. "When the band started, we got a lot of shit, got called a psychedelic freak show in a positive way and then also called a psychedelic freak show in a negative way."

"I wanted something that stepped out of the black-and-white era," says Barnes. "We got into Os Mutantes, got into Frank Zappa, but a lot of people thought it was *Romper Room* because of whatever we were doing. But in our hearts, it was never childish."

Barnes' early material is more literal and intimate, and Of Montreal garnered mixed critical reaction at first. (MAGNET's review of 1997 debut *Cherry Peel* termed it "the least enjoyable thing to be affiliated with Montreal since that horrible Expos logo.") However, Barnes later veered toward more fantastical constructs that crystallized with 1999's *The Gay Parade* and continued through last year's *Satanic Panic In The Attic*. With *Sunlandic Twins*, Barnes returns to the less fictitious, though no less fanciful, side of his writing.

"I think Kevin is underrated in pushing the 'emo' movement, using that word in the best possible sense," says Huggins. "He's written tracks with such sincerity. The songs that really get me, that I love to play, are the real confessional ones."

Perhaps sparked by marriage or the birth of his first child, Barnes' songs on *Sunlandic Twins* are equal parts reverie and reverent. The album is separated into two halves—the former jauntier, the latter more rueful.

"I was thinking about the idea of these two immortals that come down and have to deal with the pain of humans," says Barnes. "At first it's exciting, because it's a novelty. But by the end, they realize there seems to be no escape and all they have is each other. And in a way, it's how I view life: There's no escape until you die, and that's not really escape as it's not real since you're fighting against it. So all you have is someone else with which to try and escape it."

—Tony Ware

"Swords finds beauty in the sexy stretch from somnolence to aggression." - *MAGNET*

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Second Story

SLOW DAZZLE's Quiet Storm

(l-r): Peter Langland-Hassan, Tim Bracy, Shannon McArdle

As singer/songwriters in the Mendoza Line, Shannon McArdle and Tim Bracy are part of Brooklyn's most convivial collective of articulate stumblers, overeducated drinkers and wayward book-club members. As Slow Dazzle, McArdle and Bracy leave the gang behind and retire to quieter, moodier confines.

"We wanted a band that was demonstrably different from the Mendoza Line," says Bracy. "We grew up with all this bar rock: the Stones, Rockpile. I'll be buried with it, I'm sure, but we wanted to do something where those things didn't really enter into the equation."

While the pair's songwriting (think music by the Mekons, lyrics by Flannery O'Connor) remains intact, some of the new factors on Slow Dazzle's eight-song debut, *The View From The Floor* (Misra), include subtly employed drum machines, keyboards and backward guitars. Third member Peter Langland-Hassan is responsible for the atmospheric production on the album, which was recorded last summer in a Williamsburg loft.

"It was very hot with no air conditioning and really uncomfortable," remembers McArdle. "That's how we actually got the name for the record. Tim was sweating like a pig, lying on the floor—"

"I find myself there all the time," interjects Bracy.

"And he said, 'The view from the floor here is really spectacular.'"

It's important to note that McArdle and Bracy—who met in 1998 while living in Georgia and will be married later this year—haven't made a romantic, couples-only album. *Floor* contains lyrical images of cursed wedding dances, cheating spouses and domestic violence. If judged solely by the album's bitter tones, Bracy and McArdle come off as a stormy, dysfunctional version of Yo La Tengo's Ira Kaplan and Georgia Hubley.

"The most beautiful songs can have a very dark sentiment," says McArdle. "Interestingly enough, the songs I wrote are not about Tim and me. The goal for me on this record was to write songs from a male point of view."

In the case of "The Extent Of My Remarks," a track penned by Bracy, McArdle singing lines about "[taking] a woman's hand" makes for some interesting gender confusion. Bracy is eager to hold forth on the topic.

"Well, this is something that excites me," he begins.

"What excites you?" asks McArdle of her beau. "Lesbianism?"

"When I write something from a man's point of view, Shannon will sing it and not change the gender, and that makes it fun. I wrote a Mendoza Line song once called 'The Queen Of England.' It's supposed to be from a woman's point of view, and it makes mention of being a man's lover. God bless my father, who is really a very liberal man, but he was convinced I was coming out of the closet."

For McArdle and Bracy, balancing Slow Dazzle with the Mendoza Line, which will release a new EP later this year, is a welcome shift in identity.

"People who don't write songs don't realize you get so bored with writing as yourself," says McArdle. "In Slow Dazzle, I take the character of my brother, my mother, an anonymous man. There's only so much you can perceive or observe yourself."

—Matthew Fritch

Laura Cantrell

Humming By The Flowered Vine

Produced by JD Foster

"If Kitty Wells made 'Rubber Soul' it would sound like Laura Cantrell."
– Elvis Costello

"A voice that begs to be heard."
– Richard Harrington, Washington Post

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Hex Appeal

[MARY TIMONY Makes MAGNET A Mix Tape]

Mary Timony is the witchiest woman in rock, and the spellbound sounds on her latest album, *Ex Hex* (Lookout!), are conjured from simplicity. Recorded as a duo with Medications drummer Devin Ocampo and produced by Fugazi's Brendan Canty, *Ex Hex* marks Timony's return to her hometown of Washington, D.C. While Helium fans will find Timony's familiar trance-like guitars and fanciful lyrics about pirates and moons, the album puts a little Dischord into the dream machine.

B.J. SNOWDEN
"CONSPIRACY" (2002)

B.J. is one of the true gems of Boston. I had the fortunate happenstance to have played a show with her at a college in New York a few years ago. My friend Jeff and I drove seven hours through a blizzard to get there. I remember driving my car felt kind of like riding in a boat. When we docked, there was B.J. radiating glory in a golden shirt, playing her groovy tunes on a Casio accompanied by her son on bass. The college kids danced, the snow fell, her mother sold T-shirts and CDs. "Conspiracy" is B.J. at her most bad-ass.

AZITA
"ON THE ROAD" (2003)

The way Azita plays piano totally floors me. It's so graceful and interesting. She is like Thelonious Monk if he was born a girl and came up through punk music. I could lie on my back and stare at a blank wall and be entertained for hours by this. She's a cat.

AQUARIUM
"MAXXO SESH" (2005)

A local D.C. band that's like a fun indie-rock Erik Satie. They are harmonious and symmetrical. I saw them play last night at a record store, and there was also an "improv typist" there who was typing poems and some kind of performance that involved two ladies taking a few audience members at a time into a booth and doing some kind of dance for them. That scared me, but the Aquarium was great.

SAN UL RIM
"IT WAS PROBABLY LATE SUMMER" (1977)

My friend Jesper schooled me about this band when we were in Korea. They were one of the biggest Korean psych bands. Besides being on a record that has a title I can't even read (it being in a different alphabet and all), this song appears on the compilation *Love Peace And Poetry: Asian Psychedelic Music*, the one with the cover photo of a girl wearing what appears to be a bathing suit and nylon stockings. Nice combo. I saw a Korean band called Sleep over there that I really liked, and they did a cover of this song.

GARLAND OF HOURS
"WORD VERSUS" (2003)

I love the way Amy Domingues approaches writing music. It's very precise and dreamy at the same time. She's an amazing classical cellist as well. These guys are in the D.C. installment of *Burn To Shine*, a film series by Brendan Canty and Christoph Green. The films document bands performing in houses that are about to be demolished or burned.

MEDICATIONS
"...OR AT LEAST AS BAD" (2005)

These dudes are serious about kicking out the jams. Their songs are like XTC meets the MC5. When I see them live, I feel like I have to hold on to something because I could be blown over by the raw power.

CASUAL DOTS
"CLOCKS" (2003)

I love the way the two guitars play off each other. The chords change in a kind of spiral pattern in this song. It makes me want to play guitar. This is so sunny and eloquent; just a perfect song.

ALOHA
"SUMMER AWAY" (2004)

This has a killer drum sound. It also has a cool melodic passage in it that, to me, is reminiscent of Yes, then a Can-esque guitar sound for a solo later on.

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Flower Power

(The Growth Of The POSIES)

2005 (l-r): Darius Minwalla, Jon Auer, Matt Harris, Ken Stringfellow

If you're of the opinion that the Posies are the Big Star of their generation—and frankly, the Posies wouldn't have it any other way—then you could advance the notion that Jon Auer is Chris Bell to Ken Stringfellow's Alex Chilton. After all, it's Auer's Bell-like pop perfectionism that often quells his restless pal's more Chilton-esque creative cumbrances. It's just this uneasy balance of craftsmanship and chaos, along with the duo's otherworldly harmonizing, that prompted their recruitment into the revamped version of '70s indie pop's most celebrated underdogs.

"We do share many similarities," says Stringfellow of the Big Star parallels. "But the crucial difference is that Jon and I have maintained a musical connection. Chris Bell quit after the first Big Star record didn't do as well as he had hoped. I would've missed a lot if I'd done the same."

Back at it after the occasional reunion show and a handful of solo albums from each, Stringfellow and Auer have released *Every Kind Of Light* (Rykodisc), the first proper Posies album of the new millennium.

1983-1987

Auer and Stringfellow met at the Bellingham, Wash., music store where 13-year-old guitar geek Auer hung out after school. "Two guys showed up at the store one day, and one guy was hiding behind the other guy," recalls Auer. "[The guy hiding] was Ken."

Stringfellow asked Auer to join his band, but the new lineup fizzled for lack of gigs. Stringfellow headed to Seattle in 1986 for college while Auer finished high school. Within a year, the two were back in Bellingham writing songs together and trying, to no avail, to find band members.

"We checked in with each other to play what we'd been working on," says Stringfellow. "I'd written a song called 'Blind Eyes Open' about a certain situation in my life, and he'd written a song called 'Closed Eyes Open' about the same situation from his point of view. We had a good laugh about that and figured we probably deserved each other."

The two retreated to Auer's home studio in July '87 to begin recording the Posies' debut, *Failure*. "When the first wave of Beatles CDs came out, we got a hold of *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver* and never looked back," says Auer. "A lot of people go through that phase; we just happened to make a whole record out of it."

Stringfellow describes his hairstyle circa *Failure*: Aquanet Man.

1988-1990

Stringfellow and Auer self-released *Failure* on cassette in April 1988 to strong local reviews and some minor airplay. Live gigs were booked, underscoring the urgent need for band members. "They'd see us coming in our goofy goth getups with this weird pop-music tape, and they wouldn't touch us with a 10-foot pole," says Auer. "It wasn't until we sold a few thousand records and got some label interest that we had some leverage to get people to play with us."

Enter drummer Mike Musburger and bassist Rick Roberts, the first in a long line of Posies rhythm sections. The band debuted May 6, 1988, at the Attic Tavern. In August 1989, the Posies met Geffen A&R guru Gary Gersh, who signed the band to the new DGC imprint along with the likes of Sonic Youth, Teenage Fanclub and that other Seattle band, Nirvana. In spring 1990, the Posies recorded their major-label debut, *Dear 23*, in Seattle with producer John Leckie (XTC, Stone Roses).

"We worked out the arrangements quite thoroughly, then counted on Leckie to make things sonically lush and widescreen," says Stringfellow. "He did have an ambitious nature when it came to layering sounds and vocals. *Dear 23* was done on 48-track analog."

The *Los Angeles Times* only enhanced the band's continuing Beatlesque delusions by mentioning *Abbey Road* in a favorable review of *Dear 23*.

Stringfellow's hairstyle circa *Dear 23*: Muppet Hippie.

1991-1994

Opening for the Replacements in 1991 proved to be anticlimactic for the Posies. "They had reached a level where there just wasn't much left at that point," says Auer of a bill he'd rather forget. "And we weren't anywhere near the peak of our performance or togetherness at that point."

The Posies recorded *Frosting On The Beater* with producer Don Fleming (Hole, Screaming Trees, Sonic

Youth). The album's first single, "Dream All Day," was a minor success on MTV and radio. The heavier sound of *Frosting* prompted whispers that the band was pressured to grunge up its approach to suit the times. "We were just finding out how to have more power in our music," says Stringfellow. "We didn't want to be looking backward sonically, and the '60s-isms of *Dear 23* seemed a little retro to us."

Auer and Stringfellow soon joined Chilton and Jody Stephens for a Big Star reunion show in Columbia, Mo., the first step in a fitful resurrection of the esteemed Memphis band. "Gary Gersh turned me on to the Posies in '91," says Stephens. "I saw Ken and Jon play an acoustic set, and they were just incredible, with those great harmonies and all that. So that got us off to a good start."

Stringfellow married the Fastbacks' Kim Warnick in June '93. (They would divorce three years later.) Shortly thereafter, he and Auer joined Big Star for a summer European tour before hitting the road overseas with Teenage Fanclub in the fall. In November '94, the band opened for a sax-blowing Bill Clinton at a political rally in Seattle.

Stringfellow's hairstyle circa *Frosting On The Beater*: Girly Man Bob.

1995-1998

The Posies began work on the follow-up to *Frosting* in February 1995. In October, Auer and Stringfellow sang the national anthem at a Seattle Mariners playoff game. Around the same time, Scott McCaughey recruited the duo for his quirk-pop collective, the Minus 5.

Amazing Disgrace is an album whose bitter undercurrent is evident on tracks such as "Everybody Is A Fucking Liar." Says Stringfellow, "Yeah, it has some anger and dysfunction in it, but since when is that unwelcome on a rock record?"

While touring behind *Amazing Disgrace*, Auer and Stringfellow began to butt heads. "We became competitors," says Auer. "Ken was frustrated because he hadn't had a song of his that was a single. He just went for it, like, 'Goddamn it, I'm gonna be as aggressive as possible to get noticed.' I was really depressed and going through some marital problems. That was when I was like, 'I hate what I do.'"

The Posies split with DGC in early 1997. "We asked to leave," says Stringfellow. "Basically, they didn't make a video for any of the songs on *Amazing Disgrace*. We thought, 'If we can't get a video made, what's the point of being on a major label?' We left on good terms, and they even gave us money on the way out the door."

Stringfellow briefly joined SoCal pop/punk outfit Lagwagon and released of his first solo album, *This Sounds Like Goodbye*. The Posies returned to indie PopLlama for *Success*, the band's least cohesive and most subdued album. "I pretty much spelled out that the only way I would ever do another Posies record was if we used songs that had been rejected by Geffen," says Auer. "That's what became *Success*."

After a 1998 show in San Francisco, the Posies officially disbanded. Auer sampled life as a solo artist, while Stringfellow's work with Peter Buck in the Minus 5 evolved into a touring and recording gig with R.E.M. that continues to this day.

"Peter told me to learn a bunch of songs," recalls Stringfellow of the days leading up to his joining R.E.M. on 1998's *Up* tour as a multi-instrumentalist. "We rehearsed about 20 songs, almost none of which were on the proposed set list, and the next day spent four hours jamming with Neil Young. Did I have a problem with that? Not at all."

Stringfellow's hairstyle circa *Amazing Disgrace*: Radioactive Pink (Before Pink Was Pink).

1999-2005

Auer and Stringfellow didn't stay apart for long. The Posies played a one-off Seattle gig in September 1999 and released an acoustic live album, *In Case You Didn't Feel Like Plugging In*. DGC issued *Dream All Day: The Best Of The Posies*, which includes a note-perfect cover of Chris Bell's "I Am The Cosmos."

June 2003 saw the release of *Private Sides*, an EP featuring three solo songs apiece by Auer and Stringfellow, its cover art brilliantly aping Hall & Oates' *Private Eyes* album. In December, Ben Folds flew Auer to Nashville to play and sing on William Shatner's *Has Been*, which Folds was producing.

Last year, Auer and Stringfellow met Chilton and Stephens in Memphis to record Big Star's first studio album in 27 years (scheduled for release this fall). "I've yet to be on the receiving end of any behavior that comes close to the stories I've heard or read," says Auer about working with the notoriously prickly Chilton. "To me, Uncle Al is usually one funny motherfucker with a wonderfully twisted sense of humor. In the grand scheme of things, he's a very sharp tack who has little tolerance for dull blades."

With Darius Minwalla on drums and Matt Harris (Oranger) on bass, the Posies convened last year to record *Every Kind Of Light*. Auer continues his mastery of hooks and refined dynamics, while Stringfellow continues his somewhat uncomfortable excursions into bluesy rock, soul and classic crooner pop.

"For the first time, we decided the Posies would become more of a democratic process," says Auer. "We made up a song a day. There's a lot more layers to the Posies than most people acknowledge. This album is unlike anything we've done before."

Stringfellow's hairstyle circa *Every Kind Of Light*: Patrick At Toni & Guy, Bastille, Paris (Black Is Bluetiful).

—Hobart Rowland

(l-r): 1989: Auer, Rick Roberts, Stringfellow, Mike Musburger; 1993: Stringfellow, Musburger, Dave Fox, Auer; 1996: Auer, Joe Skyward, Brian Young, Stringfellow

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

POSIES

Failure (PopLlama), 1988
Dear 23 (DGC), 1990
Frosting On The Beater (DGC), 1993
Amazing Disgrace (DGC), 1996
Success (PopLlama), 1998
Every Kind Of Light (Rykodisc), 2005

KEN STRINGFELLOW

This Sounds Like Goodbye (Hidden Agenda), 1997
Touched (Manifesto), 2001
Soft Commands (Yep Roc), 2004

JON AUER

The Perfect Size EP (Houston Party), 2000
6 Ω (Orchard), 2001

Dear MAGNET

Crossing Canada With The CONSTANTINES

As spring turned to summer all across Canada, the Constantines and the Weakerthans embarked on a six-week, Newfoundland-to-Vancouver tour dubbed the Rolling Tundra Revue. As with Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue 30 years ago, there's a native ceremony, a hard rain and a logbook—this one by Constantines guitarist/singer Steve Lambke.

March 28, Quebec City

The room is smoky, and the backstage is smaller than a closet. The opening band has cancelled, so Will (Kidman, Constantines keyboardist) plays as Woolly Leaves: a great set in a loud and chattering bar. I'm watching from the side with Bry (Webb, Cons singer/guitarist) as a woman in the front row stares soft-eyed at Will and his beautiful songs. I play Hot Dice—a gambling game we learned from Oneida on our last tour—with Pete Wagner, our merch guy. I'm playing big; I win one, I lose one. It's always a little misty in old Quebec, beautiful old stone and that strange, rainy light and the black-haired girls.

March 29, Quebec City

Bry wins Hot Dice in the back of the club, so he doesn't have to help with load-in. Bry, ever the gentleman, attempts to help out, but we're playing for stakes. There needs to be stakes. Our friend Jessie Stein surprises us by driving to the show from Montreal, fresh from her own tour, ready to keep on rocking, ready to keep on wandering.

At the end of the set, everything falls to pieces. I've broken three guitar strings, my strap's come loose, and my guitar has fallen to the floor. I'm left yelling like a broken fool. I'm hugging everyone I can get my arms on, underage French girls hiding from this sweaty boy in their midst as I lay arms on their boyfriends. I'm thanking them for coming to the show, and I have no idea if anyone knows what I'm saying. I'm spreading as much love as I can manage. None of my hugs are returned, except by Jessie, who hugs me truly and righteously. I finish the song in a wide and empty circle, but I can see people smiling.

During the Weakerthans' set, Laura from Newfoundland interviews us backstage and conducts the ancient and grand ceremony of Screeching that will make us honorary Newfoundlanders. Somehow, we've missed out on this both times we've been to the island, but today we will right the wrongs. Though we are born mainlanders, after today, we will forever be tied to the ocean. We recite the sacred vows, we learn the rudiments of the language, we're screaming and yelling, we're sneaking drinks from the sacred bottle, we have no cod to kiss so are left kissing each other, salty enough after the show to pass, rowdy and incoherent. We stumble out for the closing song, proud and drunk on our new status.

March 30, Montreal

Summer came—*bam!*—just like that, and we're driving with the windows down: Look out! For the second year in a row, we manage to play with one of Toronto's finest rock bands, the almighty Lullabye Arkestra, on Katia (Taylor)'s birthday. Katia sings and plays a wicked bass. Justin (Small) plays drums, leads the crowd in a tender round of "Happy Birthday" and immediately shouts, "This next song is called 'Ass Worship,'" counting it in. The Arkestra is a heavy band. Their love is heavy. Tom McKnight—a friend of ours who's immortalized on "The McKnight Life," a song on our first album—is at the show and repeatedly tells Weakerthans singer/guitarist John Samson, "I like what you've done with your hair."

March 31, Montreal

Dallas (Wehrle, Cons bassist) twists his ankle at the show and will walk with a very stylish cane for the rest of the tour.

April 1, Ottawa

The first night in Ottawa is quiet. Everyone is far away and sitting down. I eat poutine—french fries with melted cheese and gravy—after the show from the stand across the street.

April 2, Ottawa

Sheets of wicked rain in Ottawa, but I'm warm and dry on Melissa and Gonzalo's front porch, smoking a cigar and drinking rum, watching the rain fall into the icy Rideau River. Melissa is a friend from our days at Guelph University, and her husband Gonzalo has just returned from Cuba.

Tonight's show is much better, full of rock 'n' roll excitement. We've invited the Ontario women's curling team to the show, but I don't think they're here, despite our repeated and heartfelt dedications. Dallas is shirtless with "Balls Out" written on his chest. We're shouting, "Hurry hard," in the breaks. I think our show is great and we've finally pulled one over on the Weakerthans, but, as always, they go onstage and blow us away.

Me and Ottawa are drinking buddies. The rest of the night blurs. I'm at Barrymore's with the bar staff drinking scotch.

April 3, Kingston

I sleep all the way to Kingston and never really wake up. At the hotel, we're watching *Planes, Trains And Automobiles*, and Samson comments that his dad looks like John Candy. Nobody says anything, but I know we're all finding this astoundingly hard to believe.

April 4-6, Toronto

Driving into Toronto on a warm day feels great, returning the vans and dropping off the gear. I'm home and go to get a coffee. Across the street, Duran Duran is in the windows of Much Music shaking hands with the kids who have shown up for its appearance. In the middle of the street, a shirtless man in a balloon-rimmed Santa Claus hat is flexing his muscles and yelling about love to the pop group's young fans. How does Duran Duran still have such young fans?

Strange days at home in the middle of tour. I think I've forgotten how to sleep. It's warm and summertime all over Toronto, and I'm riding my bike through familiar streets with a wandering and lustful heart. I see the Gris Gris play at the Silver Dollar. I'm a restless hole in the center of the motion of days.

April 7, Toronto

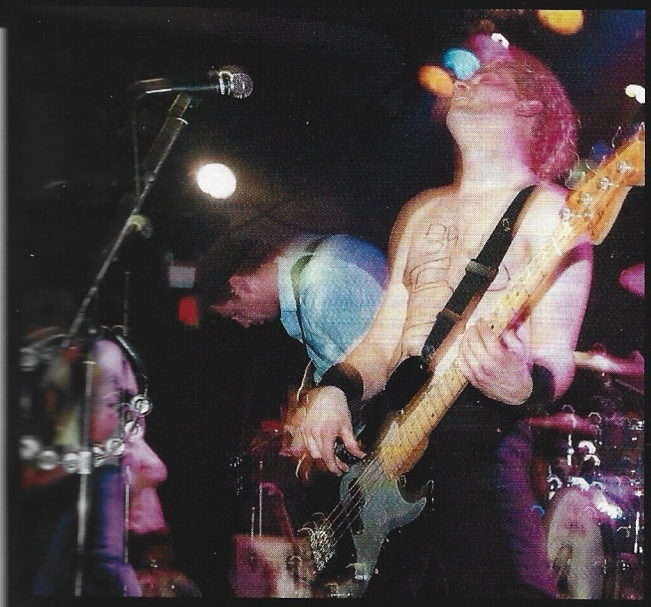
The show is a little rough. The center front monitor doesn't work, and the crowd is quiet and unmoved. Sometimes it's hard to play the hometown shows. Feeling a bit dislocated is good for rock 'n' roll. Too many familiar faces can make a guy too comfortable. It's sometimes better to feel like you don't belong.

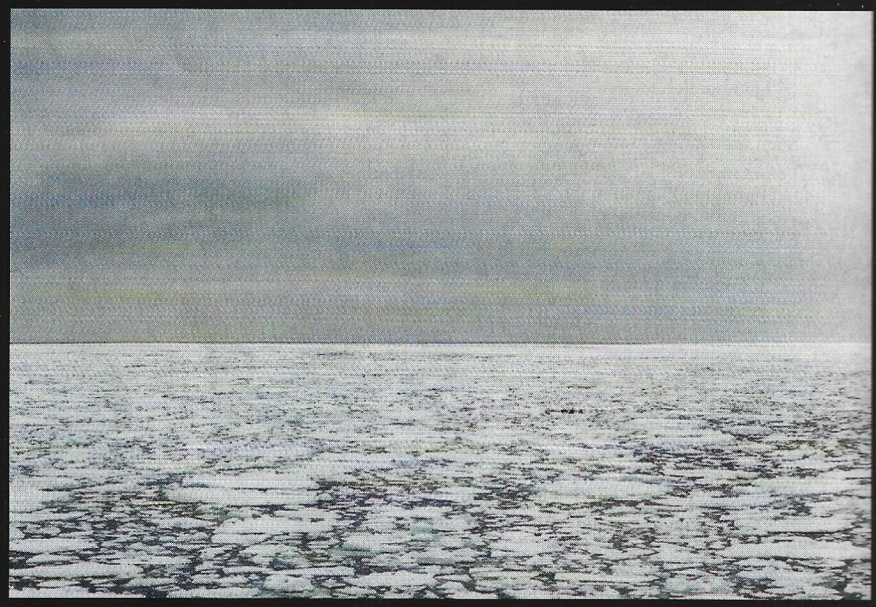
April 8, Toronto

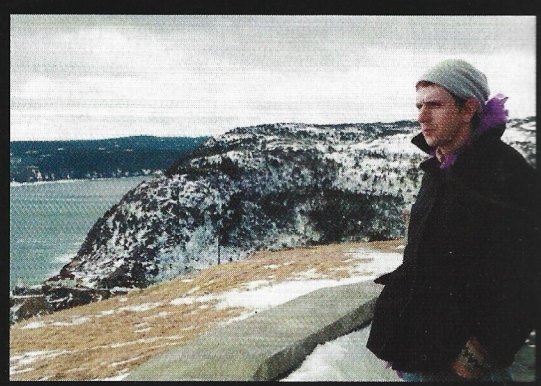
We're getting there, we're getting there. There's rock 'n' roll magic somewhere in the air, circling near, not quite but almost. Doug (MacGregor, Cons drummer) breaks all the snare drums.

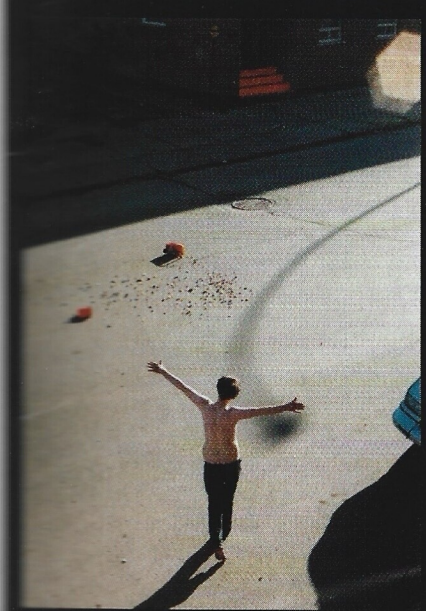
April 9, Toronto

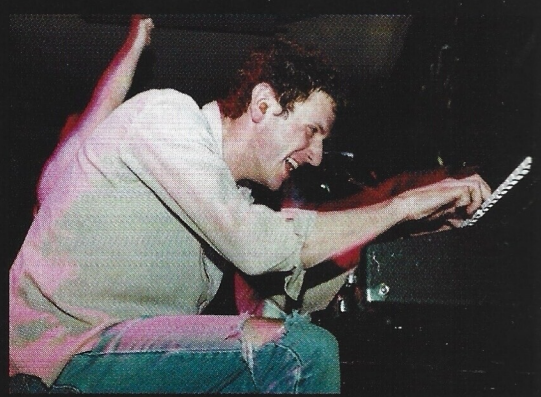
I've never had fun at our all-ages shows in Toronto, but today is good, more than crossed arms and silence. Ah, but tonight, back where we belong, with the drunks. The bar is full and loud and getting rowdy. As we go on, we're psyching each other up. Bry's saying, "This is the one." This is the loud one, all directed energy, Bry breaking the mic stand and his guitar falling, strings broken, in pieces on the floor, first song. Draw us lines. Unknown. This one's for the family. This one's for our lovers and our ex-lovers. This one's for us. This one's for everyone. This one's for everything that was and everything that will be. This one's for the unknown. At the end of the night, after we play the Traveling Wilburys' "End Of The Line" with the Weakerthans, we all hold hands in a line at the front of the stage and take a real, honest-to-god rock bow. Ha! "Thank you, thank you." We're leaving Wednesday for Winnipeg.

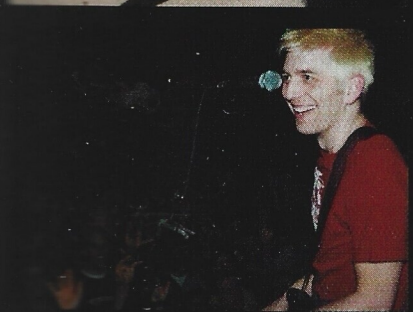






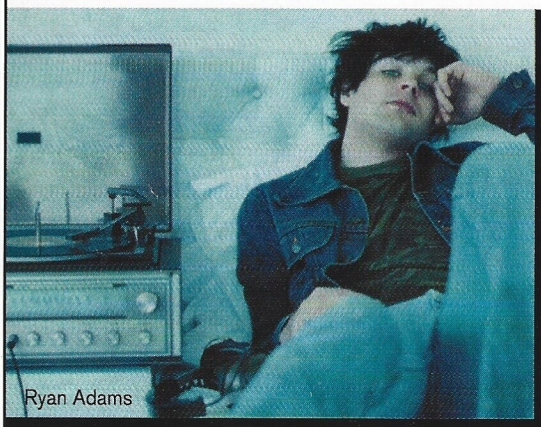




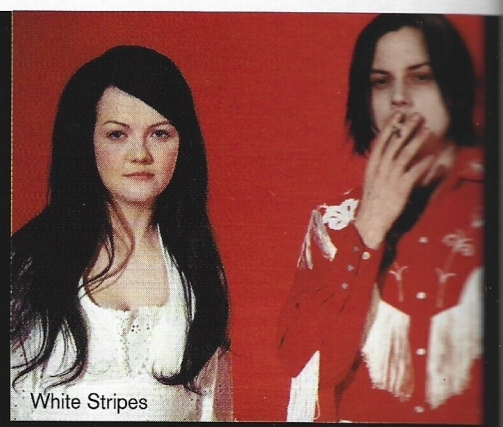


Where's The Street Team?

(On The Scene Like A Sex Machine)


Ryan Adams

B-52's


White Stripes

As with this issue's cover story on Minneapolis, there are future regional scenes just waiting for you to arrive—along with price-gouging real-estate agents, music-business predators, low-paying service-industry jobs and fun drug addictions. Here are some of the geographical hot spots that the flocks descended on at different times over the decades, lured by the critical praise of one or several bands and cheap (not for long) rent.

SEATTLE

Mother Love Bone!!! This city essentially created the mid-'90s nationwide saturation of used-CD stores. Seattle was the site of the first overblown, large-scale, almost-pornographic signing frenzy in which doe-eyed morons were blatantly tricked into signing their lives away. Also, it's not as if the grunge sound went anywhere other than into the witness-protection program under the name "stoner rock." Watch this: Green Apple Quick Step, Coffin Break, Love Battery, Gruntruck, Skin Yard, Tad. You just laughed. The great thing about Seattle is I don't even have to write a joke around it. It's instant hilarity! Even funnier is the editorial comment sent back to me as this column was being drafted: "We might have an opportunity to make a Temple Of The Dog joke."

PORTLAND, ORE./OLYMPIA, WASH.

Besides being the final resting place for the world's gutter-punk population (and the world thanks you), this scene is also where grown men act like crushed-out seventh graders and where women are taught to hate grown men. They also believe the rest of the world is full of racists, which is easy to do when everyone around you is white. Here, you get every single negative, knee-jerk nook and cranny of "politically correct." The indie phenomena that have emanated from this region read like plausible reality-TV shows: *Riot Grrrl*, *Evergreen College*, *Rock 'N' Roll Camp For Girls*.

AUSTIN, TEXAS

Home to maybe the most infuriating bumper sticker/slogan of all time: "Keep Austin Weird." Hate to break it to you, but Austin is far from weird. Austin is a perfectly scripted tragedy for the gallivanting hyper-whorings of the music business. It's an atrocity of gentrification that plays host to the South By Southwest festival, the ultimate meat grinder of delusional, soon-to-be shattered dreams. I get a never-ending kick out of non-music-biz people—the simple fans—who believe SXSW to be a worthy road trip. Why wouldn't it be? Plenty of money-sponging passes that get you nowhere, oxygen soaked up by a gazillion guys in their early-to-mid-20s who've apparently been cloned from the members of Death From Above 1979—sounds like a real slice. It will be tough to make friends with bands or publicists, as it's hard to understand what someone's saying when their lips are wrapped around the music industry's cock.

CHAPEL HILL, N.C.

This locale inspired what I like to call the "fuck it" look in indie rock. You know, the one that causes you to inquire, "When is nondescript a little too nondescript?" Is that a member of Polvo or a tool with his hand in a bowl of Beer Nuts at the local sports bar? And when's that Erectus Monotone reunion? Chapel Hill is probably single-handedly responsible for the indie-rock backlash, what with Archers Of Loaf, Small, Finger ... where can I go wrong with that assumption? This town gave the world the Colin Farrell of indie, Ryan Adams.

ATHENS, GA.

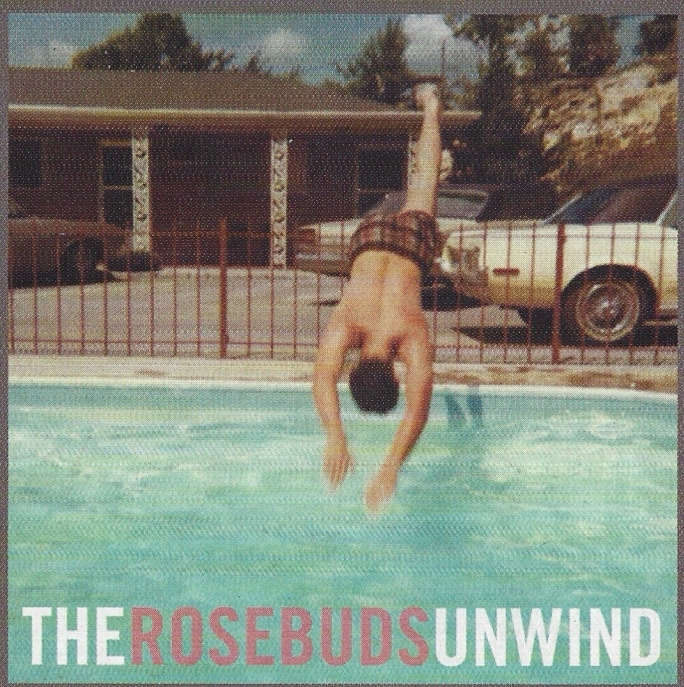
It's the town that made you hate the word "quirky." No, it's the town that made me hate the B-52's: the AARP *Big Chill* Appreciation Club house band. What's scary about this place are the people who went there for college, joined a band that farted out a couple of free coupons into the cutout bin, freaked out, went to grad school, didn't finish grad school, enlisted in the ranks of serious alcoholism and currently work at a bookstore where they freak out some more. Tiny towns with huge music scenes make for terrible social anxiety; you can't leave the house without running into some asshole who already hates you or vice versa. No thanks.

DETROIT

Some things to get clear: 1) Mick Collins' every utterance is not *cause célèbre* (the man's discography is 50 percent other people's material, for chrissake), though he could probably mobilize an evil army of slovenly Chuck-Taylors-and-T-shirt-wearing nimrods. 2) The White Stripes sound like *Led Zeppelin III*. *Led Zeppelin III* does not have a Detroit connection. 3) The only interesting thing the Von Bondies could possibly do next is commit group suicide onstage. 4) You've done nothing so substantial with your life that it justifies you wear sunglasses at night or indoors. (Well, unless you're really old.) 5) The MC5 never really rocked that hard. In fact, *High Time* and *Back In The USA* are limp, hard-rock records that were destroyed by heavier, better-penned corporate rock like Grand Funk.

—*Andrew Earles*

"LIKE THE BEST **EAR CANDY,** TEENAGE FANGLUB **IS INSTANT, SWEET, AND NEVER ENOUGH."**
CMJ Monthly



"**WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD** THIS WOULD BE IF THE ROSEBUDS' GIDDY GARAGE **POP** WERE TO POUR FORTH FROM **EVERY RADIO THIS SUMMER."**
News and Observer

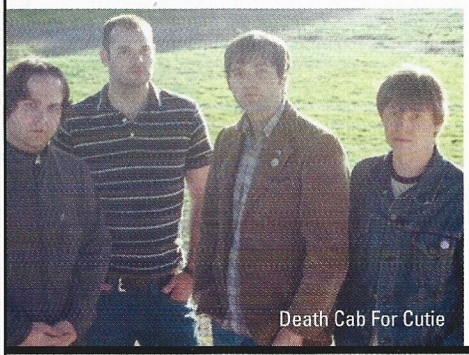
ON TOUR TOGETHER THIS SUMMER

PREVIEW BOTH ALBUMS AT WWW.MERGERECORDS.COM

MERGE RECORDS

(IN THE STUDIO)

For all the **Death Cab For Cutie** fantards feeling anxious about the band's jump to a major label (Atlantic), bassist Nick Harmer has some reassuring words. "Making this record has been as close to ideal as I could have ever hoped for," he says. "Our new label has given us plenty of creative space, and we have reached that spot after years of friendship where we can communicate to one another almost without speaking. I don't think we have ever come close to making a record that we are this proud of, but I also know that we have never lost so much of our minds making one." *Plans*, Death Cab's fifth full-length produced, mixed and mastered by Chris Walla, will be released September 20.



Death Cab For Cutie

My Morning Jacket has completed its fourth album. *Z*, produced by John Leckie and MMJ singer/guitarist Jim James, is due on RCA/ATO in September and features guest musicians M. Ward and Andrew Bird. "One of the interesting things about the record is that we're trying to capture everything live," says Leckie, who's produced landmark albums for the Stone Roses, Verve and Radiohead. "What you hear on the finished record is actually the recording that happened just once." And yes, there's still lots of reverb.

TV On The Radio is working on the follow-up to last year's *Desperate Youth, Blood Thirsty Babes*. Guests Craig Wedren (Shudder To Think), Photek and members of Antibalas have joined TVOTR in guitarist David Sitek's new studio, Stay Gold. No title or release date is yet available from the band's label, Touch And Go.

Several Merge groups are in the studio: The **Rosebuds** are busy recording their sophomore album, set for a September release, with Brian Paulson. Over in the U.K., the **Clientele** and **Buzzcocks** are finishing up new albums. The former's *Strange Geometry* is due in October, the latter's as-yet-untitled effort is due in September.

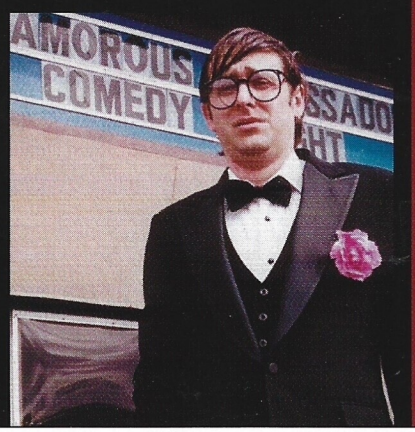
(SITE INSPECTION) WWW.SUNSQUASHED.COM

Can't get enough of Hoboken heroes Yo La Tengo? Surf over to Sunsquashed and access scores of live material available for streaming or as free downloads. One obvious highlight is the complete in-studio set YLT performed during last year's WFMU fundraiser: impromptu renditions of songs by Grand Funk, the Clean, Gary Numan and, uh, Billy Joel. Here's hoping this year's performance, with its deft juggling of the Who, OutKast, Roky Erickson, Twinkeyz, Pere Ubu and more, will be uploaded to the site in the near future.

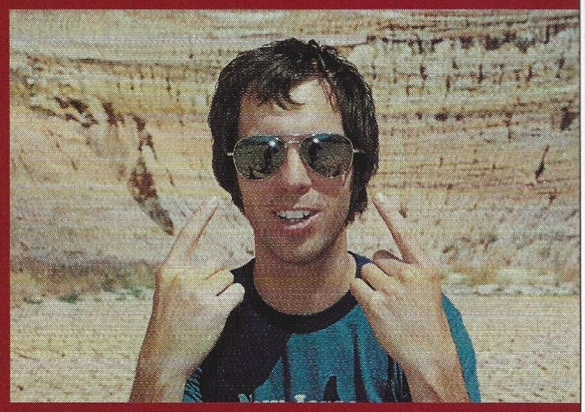
(PLEASE EXPLAIN ...) NEIL HAMBURGER

We hear your new comedy album, *Great Moments At Di Presa's Pizza House* (Drag City), is your *Sgt. Pepper*. What's that supposed to mean?

That's just something some guy said. He happens to be the most respected newspaper critic in the country. It *is* a funny album, much like *Sgt. Pepper*. But truthfully, it's more of a White Album, with the sparse packaging. Drag City had to cut corners, and it wasn't going to be on the heating bill! So for the cover, they used cheap "stock album art." It's an audio documentary of one of America's oldest pizza parlors, and we "peppered" it with "mozza" laughs. If they gave an award for trying too hard, I believe I would deserve it for this record.



Five Questions For BEN FOLDS



After going solo, getting married and having kids, Ben Folds has grown up. At least his music has, moving from the nyah-nyah-ing piano pop of yore to the maturity and command of his latest album, *Songs For Silverman* (Epic). Filled with melancholy meditations on lost friends (Elliott Smith, on "Late") and new additions (his daughter, on "Gracie"), *Songs For Silverman* also opens his snarky pop pianissimos to gospel harmonies ("Jesusland") and pastoral jazz ("You To Thank"). Folds also recently released a cover of Dr. Dre's "Bitches Ain't Shit" via iTunes.

What do you think you'll look like when old age truly strikes—not this 38-year-old manchild you are now?

I'll have a big, fat ass and no hair, and I'll slump over a bit more, maybe. I guess I write coming-of-age songs, so people ask about age a lot. But I don't really think about it much. The Depends fit nicely in my baggy pants, so they don't show onstage. I'm fine.

How did the Dr. Dre cover come about? You don't seem at all like you're fooling around here.

Thank you. No, I was serious about that song. Of course, there's absurdity in it. Dr. Dre certainly thought so when he recorded it to begin with. I wanted to make it melodic. Dre's phrasing is beautiful and exotic to me.

I must confess that I never really liked Elliott Smith's music much. But on "Late," you made me want to revisit him. How?

You must have the Elliott gene to decode it. Many do and many don't; there is no pattern. I do. His music moves me, and that's all I can really say. He was also such a great craftsman, and I felt a little less lonely as a pop craftsman to know there's another guy out there throwing lots of chords and words around and making something meaningful out of it all. Listen to *Either/Or* a few times and call me in the morning.

Outside of this interview, is there anything in your career you wish you hadn't done?

I've regretted nearly every cutting remark I have ever made about another artist. Sometimes I'm quoted out of context, like I recently was about Tori Amos and Wayne Coyne. I regret my decision to take troops into Iraq, and I regret wrecking wildlife to drill for oil. Wait. Sorry, that was someone else.

Seriously, which Silverman?

Alicia, of course.

—A.D. Amorosi

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THE BIRDCAGE

CARDINAL Album Flies Again

When Cardinal opened its 1994 self-titled debut with the lines, "Listen to the sound that makes the world go 'round/My feet won't touch the ground in a world that let me down," it seemed Richard Davies and Eric Matthews were making an arrogant proclamation. The early '90s were an era of grunge and intentional tape hiss, a time when even nice boys like Pavement buried their arch literary references in guitar squall and obtuse lyrics. Cardinal's orchestral, baroque pop was refreshing.

Unfortunately, the duo split because of a personality clash, and only one album was ever released. The band's label, Flydaddy, folded, and *Cardinal* fell out of print, perhaps adding to its legendary mystique. The new, 21-track reissue of *Cardinal* (Empyrean) adds all of the band's equally rare seven-inches as well as some demos from early sessions.

MAGNET solicited comment from Davies and Matthews.

Can you elaborate on the problems that caused Cardinal to end prematurely?

Davies: I was fine for Cardinal to continue, but Eric was determined to have a solo career. I thought we would have ruled the world for a while and it would have been an easy conquest. So my solo career was borne of necessity.

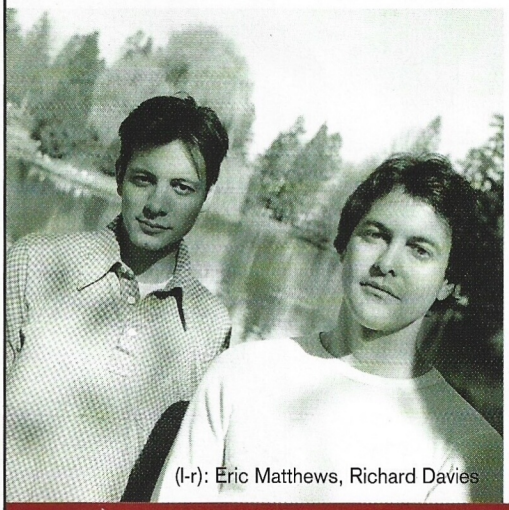
Matthews: I will admit to being forceful in my pursuit of excellence, but I was as sensitive as I could be. That left some scar tissue, I guess. Richard felt like I had used my success in Cardinal to shoot out ahead of him. I was accused of plotting my rise to solo fame and climbing over the corpse of Cardinal. He told me a bunch of crap like this one time, and then it got ugly. At that point, we just went our separate ways.

Will Cardinal ever reunite?

Davies: Cardinal will be guaranteed to catch reunion fever—and I know I speak for Eric and myself on this—if and when a record company is willing to back Cardinal to make a great album properly. It's that simple.

Matthews: I don't think so. He's a lawyer now with a family. We are talking about me doing some arrangements on his next record, though. We will see.

—David Dunlap Jr.



(l-r): Eric Matthews, Richard Davies

(NOTES)

FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Calexico

Soon-to-be tourmates **Iron & Wine** and **Calexico** have collaborated on a seven-track EP titled *In The Reins*, due September 13 on the Overcoat label. Sam Beam provides vocals for all the tracks, with Calexico turning up the heat behind him.

As an engineer at Tucson, Ariz.'s Wavelab studio, **Nick Luca** has spent plenty of time with Calexico, Iron & Wine, Neko Case, Steve Wynn, M. Ward—the list goes on. On the new *You Win Again* (Funzalo), he steps out from behind the board to lead his own trio (which goes by the name Luca and has served as John Doe's backing band). *You Win Again* doesn't have any overriding influence, but you can hear hints of Wynn's sensitive side and Giant Sand's late-night vibe.

You can always rely on the omnipresent Giant Sand for a segue: Sand producer **John Parish** will release his third solo album, *Once Upon A Little Time* (Thrill Jockey), this fall. As with Luca, you can point to some of Parish's studio clients as touchstones on the record. His vocals can be eerily eels-like, and the album's stately pace recalls Sparklehorse. Though Parish has never produced a Beck album, curiously titled *Little Time* track "Sea Defence" could be a *Sea Change* outtake.

If you just can't get enough producer/artist action, this fall will also bring new albums by **Daniel Lanois** (*Belladonna*), **Brian Eno** (*Another Day On Earth*) and **John Vanderslice** (*Pixel Revolt*). **Scott Walker**'s album for 4AD is still in progress and will most likely arrive in 2006.

Nottingham, England's **Six By Seven** has also been missing in action recently, but will resurface August 16 with its fourth LP, the aptly titled *04* (The First Time). The hard-charging space rockers recorded and mixed portions of the album with Tim Holmes (Death In Vegas) and Dave Fridmann (Mercury Rev, Flaming Lips).

Finally—since this is a Minneapolis-themed issue and all—the baseball fans and Twin Cities natives in the **Hold Steady** are ecstatic to report that WCCO, the Minnesota Twins' AM-radio broadcast station, have been using Hold Steady songs to fade into and out of commercials.

(NOW PLAYING)

Laura Cantrell
Solo artist and host of *The Radio Thrift Shop* on WFMU; www.wfmu.org

Big Memphis Ma Rainey "Call Me Anything" from *Memphis Belles: The Women Of Sun Records* (Bear Family)
Johnny Paycheck "Shackles And Chains" from *The Little Darlin' Sound Of Johnny Paycheck* (Koch)
Merle Travis & Joe Maphis "West Coast Blues" from *Country Music's Two Guitar Greats* (Sundazed)
Jimmy Hill with his Steam Heated Steel Guitar "Dribble" from *Wildcat Jamboree!* (Norton)
Elizabeth McQueen & The Firebrands "Local Girls" from *Happy Doing What We're Doing* (Freedom)
Jesse Sykes & The Sweet Hereafter "Tell The Boys" from *Oh, My Girl* (Barsuk)
Laura Veirs "Rapture" from *Carbon Glacier* (Nonesuch)
Richard Buckner "Her" from *Dents And Shells* (Merge)
Yo La Tengo "Tears Are In Your Eyes" from *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside-Out* (Matador)

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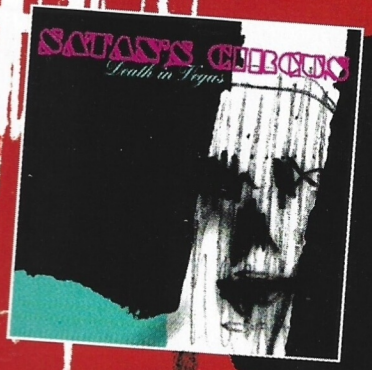

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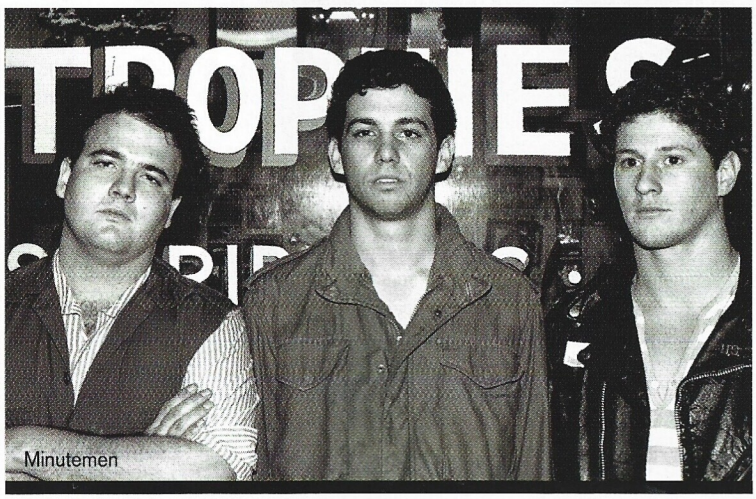
THE Lab

Econoclasm

New Doc Clocks The MINUTEMEN

Forgive Tim Irwin and Keith Schieron for sounding like fanatics when discussing their new film, *We Jam Econo: The Story Of The Minutemen*. For nearly 15 years, they dreamed about making a documentary on Mike Watt, George Hurley and D. Boon, the pioneering punk rockers from San Pedro, Calif.

"When you hear the silly question, 'If you could have lunch with anyone dead or alive, who would it be?' people always say someone like Abraham Lincoln," says Schieron. "For me, it has always been Mike Watt."



Minutemen

Irwin and Schieron had the opportunity to spend plenty of time with the bassist while making their documentary, an invigorating look at the Minutemen's six-year history, which spans 11 records and nearly 150 songs. The band came to a tragic end on Dec. 22, 1985, when singer/guitarist Boon was killed in a car accident.

We Jam Econo has its roots in 1989, when Schieron and Irwin attended high school in San Jose, Calif. After reading about the Minutemen in a magazine, Schieron bought the band's 1981 record *The Punch Line*.

"I was blown away," says Schieron. "I had never heard anything like that. At the time, I was listening to the Specials, Madness, Oingo Boingo. It sounds clichéd now, but I knew right then that they were my favorite band and would always be my favorite band."

Irwin was struck by the Minutemen's passionate, do-it-yourself work ethic. "It was an epiphany," he says. "High school is a pretty crazy time. When you have these epiphanies, they really stick with you. It's kind of like a frame of reference for viewing the world."

Schieron and Irwin lost touch after high school, going in different directions for college. When the two reunited years later, the desire to document the Minutemen's career hadn't subsided. (Schieron now works for a software company; Irwin is an extreme-sports filmmaker, having made documentaries on everything from BMX bikers to surfer Laird Hamilton. He teaches film studies at Brigham Young University.)

With Irwin as director and Schieron as producer, the pair started shooting in January 2003. *We Jam Econo* premiered in January and is playing at film festivals and independent theaters this summer. A DVD release is set for the fall.

We Jam Econo is a rousing film, featuring plenty of live footage of the band as well as archival interviews. In addition, there are new interviews with nearly every scenester who knew or was influenced by the Minutemen, including Jello Biafra, John Doe, Richard Hell, J Mascis, Richard Meltzer and Henry Rollins. (There's also commentary from Watt's mother, Jean.)

The film's brightest moments, however, occur when Watt tools around San Pedro in his van, pointing out where he first met Boon, bought his first T.Rex album and played his first gig. Watt offers vivid, funny anecdotes about his relationship with Boon, recalling all the months they spent as teens attempting to play "Smoke On The Water" in Watt's bedroom before realizing they needed to tune their instruments.

For Schieron, making the film was the ultimate experience. "I hope this doesn't sound cheesy or kiss-ass, but I don't know how my life would be if it wasn't for the Minutemen," he says. "It's the whole thing Watt says at the end of shows: 'Go start your own band, go paint your own painting, go write your own book. Create and let out what's in your heart and soul.'"

—John Elsasser

Cash 'N' Carry

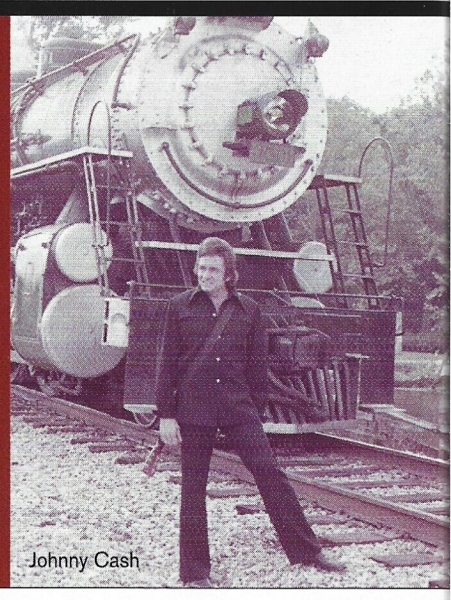
As of this writing, there are less than 200 shopping days until the November 18 opening of *Walk The Line*, the big-screen biopic on Johnny and June Carter Cash. The aspiring holiday blockbuster finds Joaquin Phoenix (Johnny) and Reese Witherspoon (June) in a film co-written and directed by James Mangold, who's responsible for *Kate & Leopold* and *Girl, Interrupted*. So, yes, given that pedigree, you should be worried.

To mark the 50th anniversary of Johnny's first single, "Cry, Cry, Cry," Legacy Recordings has released *The Legend*. The dandy four-CD set is an embarrassment of Cash riches, from a coffee-table book of photos to 104 songs. The set includes a bonus DVD, *Johnny Cash: The First 25 Years* (a musical variety show that aired in 1980). Cash performs "Ring Of Fire" and "Folsom Prison Blues" and teams up with Kris Kristofferson and Waylon Jennings for several duets. (If you haven't been Cashed out yet, there's the new *Keep On The Sunny Side—Her Life in Music*, a two-CD set that spans June's 64-year career.)

Meanwhile, Rhino Home Video recently released *Johnny Cash: Ridin' The Rails (The Great American Train Story)* on DVD. While this TV special (it first aired in 1974) is corny—it features reenactments of historical railroading moments told through the songs and stories of Cash—you'll marvel at his hair, sideburns and wardrobe. He gets your attention from the get-go with that familiar deep rumble: "There's nothing that stirs my imagination like the sound of a steam locomotive, that lonesome whistle cutting through the night and that column of black smoke and steam throwing shadows across the land."

Good luck, Joaquin.

—J.E.


Johnny Cash

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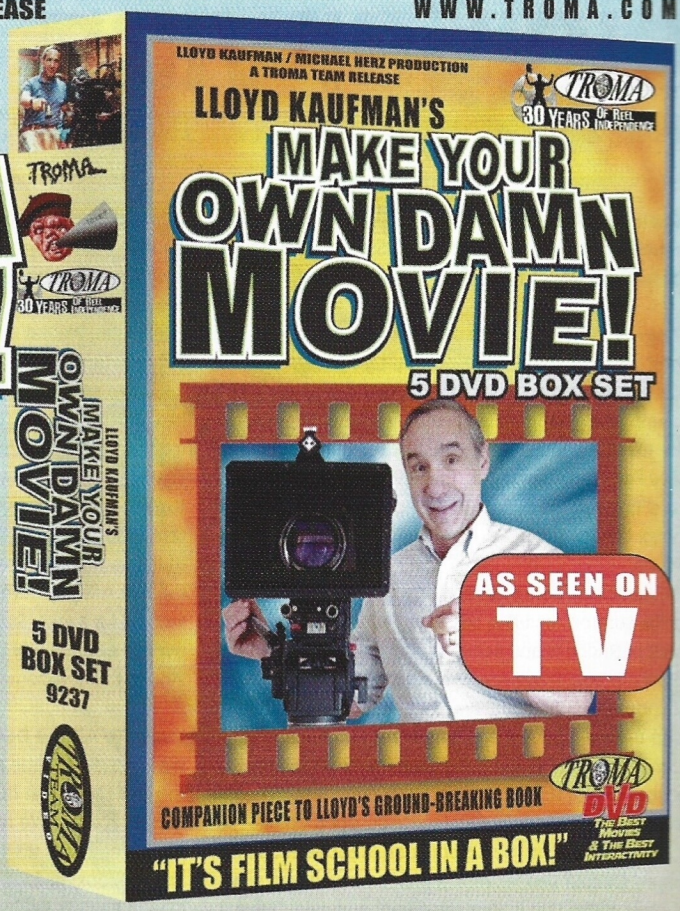
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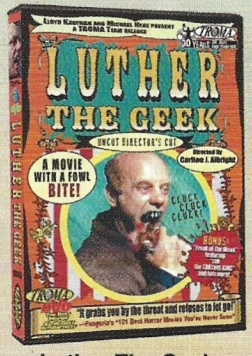

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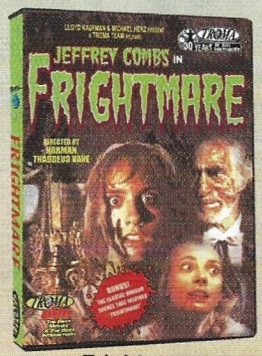

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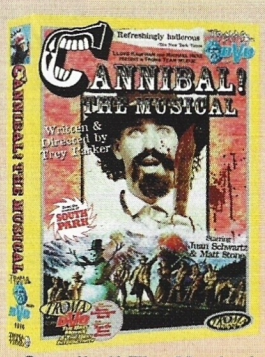
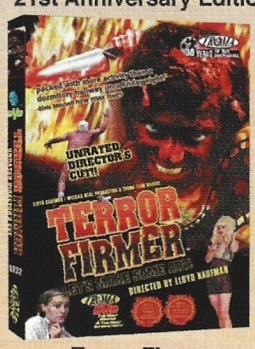


Cannibal! The Musical



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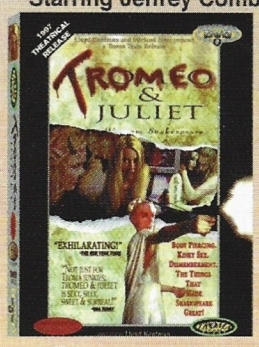

Tromeo & Juliet

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Lip Service (Frenchkiss Records)

When not playing bass for Les Savy Fav or pimping himself as a male model, Syd Butler runs Frenchkiss Records.

I know it's indie cliché to say that the catalyst for the label was to put out amazing albums and to provide a place for unaltered expression modeled after the examples of Dischord and Touch And Go, but it's just the truth. Between Hold Steady killer parties and Les Savy Fav van breakdowns, my adventures have included a colorful lot of talented people. Here are a few things I've learned:

It's All About Being Loved

In the summer of 1996, Les Savy Fav left the safe confines of Rhode Island School of Design to tour with the Make-Up and Trans Am. We sent out demo tapes to anyone with a zip code. We were supposed to meet up with Brainiac, but its booking agent kicked us off the tour at the last minute. We pulled favors, met amazing people (hello, Har Mar Superstar!) and slept on floor after floor after floor. In San Francisco, our friend got us a 5-p.m. show at the Chameleon Club for $30. We played for four people. At the end of the show, this hippie guy walked up, shook our hands and said, "Finally, the worst band in the world." We loved it! This dude sat through an entire show, submitting himself to his own worst version of awful. We were psyched. We caused a reaction, an opinion. We were not mediocre! To be loved or hated was progress.

You've Got To Be A Part Of It

In 1999, my roommate got tired of sitting on boxes of CDs and kicked my ass out. So I moved the office next door. In those days, New York City's meatpacking district was ripe and red and gross with blood covering the sidewalks. Now it's gross with Dodge Vipers and Elton John. We eat pizza from Village Pizza, mini hamburgers from Pop Burger and $5 Chinese lunch specials. We see drag queens and "the crazies" walking next to the tourists. We work right around the corner from Ace Fu Records. We see models on their way to castings. I look into Matthew Barney's studio; he tries to keep our prying eyes out, but we have our ways. We drink a lot of coffee and try to hang with our bands as much as possible. Frenchkiss is an open hang for all of them. It rules to have Jerry Fuchs from Turing Machine stop by for a joke, Seth Jabour from Les Savy Fav come over to eat lunch or Ian Menard from Detachment Kit stop in to show some of his rad artwork.

Listen To All The Demos

We have demo time at the end of the week. We listen to all of them. The frustrating part is the lack of information we get. We received an amazing demo a couple of years ago with no information written on it. We are still looking for the band. So please, write on the CD—in English, in nice handwriting—your band's name and a contact.

Marry Up

I'm lucky. I've got a beautiful, talented and successful partner/girlfriend, Amy Carlson. She's on the TV show *Law & Order: Trial By Jury*, and when times get tight, she comes to the rescue, helping to pay for postage and publicity. I've also funded the record label by being

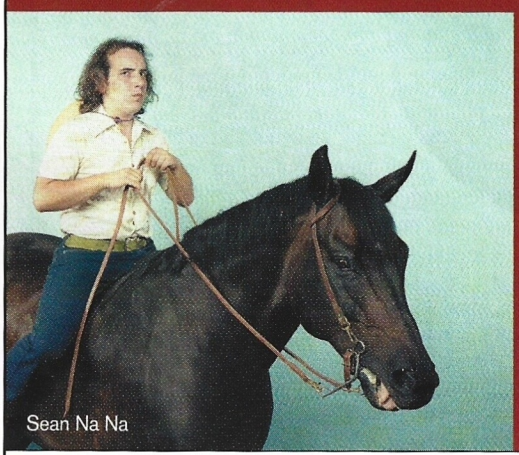
Syd Butler

the blurry guy in the background of Estée Lauder ads and by hawking Diet Coke in TV commercials.

Know What You're Good At

I went to RISD and learned how to make films. I have no idea how to program a computer and think it's a waste of time for me to learn. There are people who love it. Find them. Hire them. Pay them. Use them. Get interns. Buy them pizza.

Making Out



Sean Na Na

Hook up with these Frenchkiss LPs:

HOLD STEADY

Ex-Lifter Puller singer/guitarist Craig Finn resurrects his shot-from-the-hip-flask rants and dresses them down with bar-rock riffs. **Recommended:** 2004's *Almost Killed Me*

LES SAVY FAV

Singer Tim Harrington's stage antics—covering himself in tinfoil, dressing up as a cat, etc.—tend to overshadow this band's serious effort to violate Brooklyn's noise code. Fans of *In On The Killtaker*-era Fugazi, take note. **Recommended:** 1999's *The Cat And The Cobra*

S PRCSS

Had the ex-paramours in Liars (Angus Andrew) and Yeah Yeah Yeahs (Karen O) ever formed a group together, it might've sounded like S Prcss. Before Bob Doto and Daneil Mazone split last year, they made tense, moody new wave. **Recommended:** 2003's *MNML*

SEAN NA NA

Before he morphed into R&B-crooning caricature Har Mar Superstar, Sean Tillman used his golden throat to sing teen-friendly pop/punk. Tillman's Sean Na Na incarnation was more Ted Leo than Teddy Pendergrass. **Recommended:** 2002's *My Majesty*

TURING MACHINE

Turing Machine doesn't overthink its krautrock/metal jams. The New York instrumental trio sounds like the Fucking Champs playing Stereolab. **Recommended:** 2004's *Zwei*

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(On The Record)

A CONVERSATION WITH ... JOE PERNICE

Singer/songwriter albums are windows: Sometimes you're supposed to see the artist through them, sometimes you and your world are being observed. But peer through Joe Pernice's rose-colored melodies and teabag-brown lyrics and you get muted glimpses of some other place, a settlement grown up around a frontier poet's 40 stanzas and a senryu. The new Pernice Brothers album, *Discover A Lovelier You* (Ashmont), is an especially satisfying travelogue of Pernice's watercolor idyll. The arrangements are more resourceful—wiring a New Order hum to the pastoral "There Goes The Sun," winding the Magnetic Fields music box for lullaby "Sell Your Hair," letting the reverberating title track glide by wordlessly—and the writing is his most graceful and confident yet. Pernice is equally ingratiating in conversation about songwriting, politics and baseball, the airborne tenor of his singing voice lowered to a Massachusetts-everyman tone that sounds like Warren Beatty raised by the *Car Talk* guys.

You pronounce your name Per-NEES. Where's that from?
It's Italian. My grandparents were Italian, and the name was (pronounced) Per-NEE-chay, which is Italian for "partridge." I'm surprised it didn't get changed to Partridge.

Were you raised Catholic?
Yes. Catholic school the whole way, right up to college. At Amherst, I remember thinking it was the first time I hadn't worn a tie to class.

How secular are you feeling these days?
Very, very secular. My personal belief is that people's religion is their business. What was depressing with the whole Terri Schiavo thing was the media coverage. You could see them trying to figure out how to rope in the *Cops*-watching crowd. I can't watch the news anymore. You can't watch CNN for anything. After she died, there's the headline: "Pope Receives Feeding Tube."

What was your involvement in the Kerry campaign last fall?
We did a string of three gigs and donated the money to the campaign. It was a few thousand, maybe five. We just made it known up front that the money was going there. But there were no speeches. Outside of the voter-registration business, you would never have known you weren't at a regular gig.

How do you feel about the outcome?
I think there certainly is a period of wanting to bury your head in the sand and not think of it anymore. It was emotional. I can't hear the stuff going on. It depresses me. Right now, it feels like there's no way to stop these guys from doing anything they want. And that was the fear people had, and it's like, "Oh, my god, it's happened."

Did you get much reaction from your audience?
For the most part, it was uneventful. We got a couple of angry e-mails. I can understand why someone vehemently for a cause wouldn't want to listen to you anymore. So you know you'll lose a few fans. I guess we could have just had the show and not told people where our salary, our profit, was going. But we felt like it wouldn't be very cool to do that.

You've worked as an editor and a proofreader. What mistakes always drive you crazy?
I don't have pet peeves about apostrophe use. It doesn't upset me, but I love malaprop. It's very entertaining. The greatest sentence I've ever heard, this friend of mine who worked at a restaurant got this postcard from a bit of a Luddite. It said, "Guy's you should of came." For years, I've had *Should Of Came* as a working title for an album.

You're a favorite among critic types, professional and semi-pro. Do you read music blogs or, for that matter, the mainstream music press?
I don't read much press at all. I've stopped doing it. The good stuff can be as dangerous as the bad stuff. If you believe it either way, it can cloud your judgment and influence your own idea of your work.

Is that philosophy or experience talking?
Both, probably. When you start to get a string of reviews comparing you to Brian Wilson, that's just wrong. That's just not even accurate. We've never even used sleigh bells. It's more of a quality thing for me. The G-word, the genius word.

What makes you reject that?
I simply know I'm not that good.

Are you capable, or are there just very few geniuses?
I don't know if I'm capable. Maybe everybody is. I've written some pretty good songs and made some pretty good albums. It's just when things get compared with some superlatives that things get strange, you know?

Who's a genius?
In music, of course, Brian Wilson. Of course, Lennon, McCartney. Nick Drake, the body of his work. Of my generation, I do think Elliott Smith, as a songwriter. There's a good-sized list.

Can the people who aren't born geniuses craft their improvement?
I'm not into the idea of everyone hanging out and workshopping songs. That's kind of weird. But as far as craft goes, when I think of craft, I think of developing certain skills, even if it's just certain instincts. When I started to write songs regularly, I had been an MFA student, and I definitely took things I learned about editing and revision and metaphor. I went at songwriting as if I were going at writing. There has to be something magical, a spark, inspiration, for a song to be any good. But for me, there's quite a bit of revision, which I think of as craft. The word is kind of creepy, but I don't know what else to call it.

Does one or the other, the music or the lyric, have to have that magic for you to craft the other part?
You have to get rid of that word: "magical." It's too fucking Disney. It's just a matter of not being mundane. It happens occasionally that it all happens at once, but songs develop.

Does it get easier from album to album?
I think I've learned to trust whether something is pretty good. I can hear when something is crap and know not to go on with it. I trust what I like now a lot more. That's why I have my own label (Ashmont). There's a lot of freedom of knowing that it's set up that I'm the songwriter and this is the outlet for my songs and this is the label for my songs. There's ease in there that maybe I take for granted. I don't think about it that much.

Ashmont seems to be doing well. In the last issue of MAGNET, Sleater-Kinney talk about having always wanted to record for Sub Pop. Some people still remember you as the guy who wanted out of Sub Pop.
Ashmont has served me pretty well so far. I wanted to be on Sub Pop. Some people, maybe younger artists, have this idea that what you do is valid only when someone throws a lot of cash at you. That until that happens, you're just some bum scratching your way toward becoming a valid musician. As soon as a big entity wants to throw cash at you, you're on your way to arising. It's not as if people are trying to be stars. People want to feel wanted.

Are you listening to music lately? Discovering geniuses?
I haven't had time. I'm back into baseball hardcore.

When were you away from it?
I hated playing it as a kid. It bored me to tears. I used to be a rabid hockey fan, but the [NHL lockout] killed any interest I had. For the past three years, I've been back into baseball. I like stats. I like the slowness of it now. I'm a fan of long, slow films. I'll rewind the driving scene in (the 1972 Russian version of) *Solaris*. I think it must be real time.

You've lived in Toronto since you got married a couple years ago. How is it there for a baseball fan from Boston?
Great. I paid $135 Canadian to see the Blue Jays play three against the Red Sox. You can't do that in Boston. I got to go to the World Series. Major League Baseball was considering using ["Moonshot Manny," Pernice's ode to Red Sox slugger Manny Ramirez; the song eventually earned a berth over the end credits of *Fever Pitch*] for the Series. I got tickets to game two. I watched the entire season except for one game.

What's the mental connection for you between sports and music?
I was watching a Tiger (Woods) putt online, and my wife—it was Monday, and I'd probably watched it 10 times in a row—said, "Haven't you already watched that?" It keeps delivering. It has a good art quality, the something that always works. It's funny how songs can do that. You can listen to a song again and again, and it still delivers. I don't even know if a good joke can do that. There are jokes that make me laugh every time but not as hysterically as the first time. A good double play, too, my friend.

—Scott Wilson

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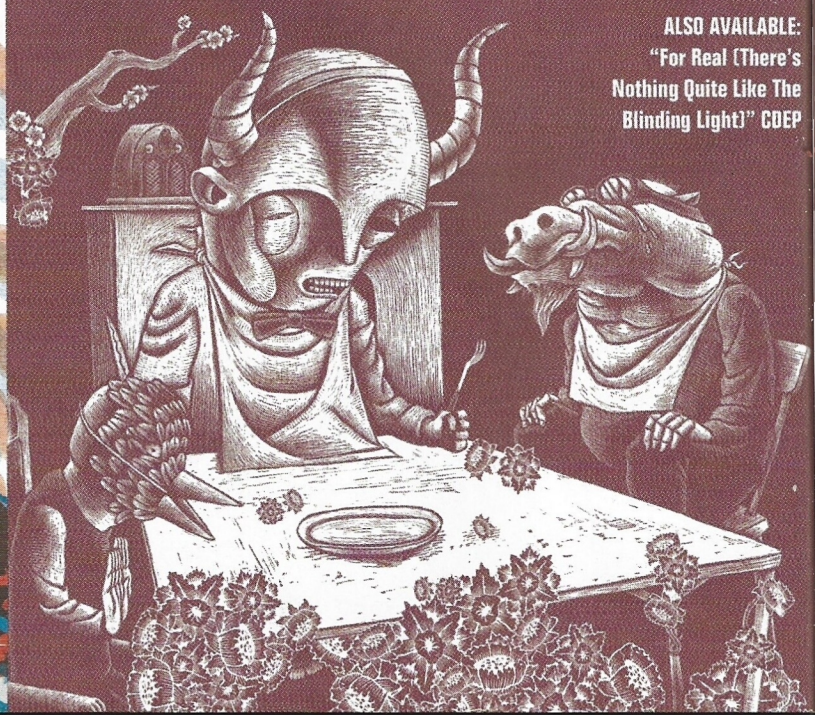

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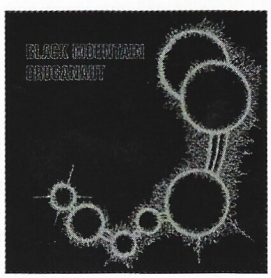

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Black Mountain »Down Home

The Portland Hotel Society is the place where you go when you've fucked up badly or gotten badly fucked up. A nonprofit social advocacy group in East Vancouver that provides "creative services for individuals living with substance misuse difficulties," the PHS buys and renovates derelict hotels in the Terminal City's drug- and disease-ravaged Downtown Eastside, then rents out the improved spaces to the city's hardest-to-house: addicts, the homeless, ex-cons. The organization is also on the front lines of Vancouver's HIV and hepatitis-C epidemics. In February 2003, the Society piloted the first safe-injection site in North America.

"It's really strange at first," says Stephen McBean, frontman and songwriter for Vancouver five-piece Black Mountain. "You walk in, and there are all these little cubicles set up. It looks like a place high-school students would go for standardized tests, only everybody here's doing heroin or cocaine."

McBean has been an employee of the Portland Hotel Society for five years. Along with bandmates Matt Camarind, Amber Webber and Josh Wells, he works at the main office of the PHS. "We're not counselors," stresses Camarind. "It's more like we're there to step in and help if anything bad happens. Like if someone needs CPR or if there's a security problem."

Camarind seems blasé when describing what must be, on occasion, pretty grim work. But the more you talk to McBean and Co., the more you suspect the curious blend of chaos and empathy in Black Mountain's music is closely linked to the physical and psychic landscape in which the band lives and works.

Black Mountain's eponymous debut, a swirling, thudding, bottom-heavy album, has been somewhat predictably pegged as sludge rock, stoner rock or Blue Cheer meets the Velvet Underground via Black Sabbath. But once you get past the low-end mix, *Black Mountain* (Jagjaguwar) is actually a pastiche of several genres, ranging from Motown soul to fuzzbox funk, frequently switching gears mid-song. Leadoff track "Modern Music" opens with a screeching sax line, after which a chugging riff propels a series of disconnected apocalyptic images ("A horse was maimed/Running wild on the freeway/A man

(l-r): Jeremy Schmidt, Stephen McBean, Matt Camarind, Josh Wells, Amber Webber

was killed/Standing still in his doorway") culminating in McBean's breathy, syrup-slow breakdown: "We can't *staaaaaand* your maw-dern *music*!"

Actually, Black Mountain grew out of the band members' love for modern music—all kinds of it, from Black Flag to the Wu-Tang Clan, the current van favorite on long drives between shows. Black Mountain is the latest incarnation of a collective that began six years ago with McBean and Wells' stripped-down art-rock project, Jerk With A Bomb. The pair quickly attracted several temporary players from Vancouver's busy underground scene, and by the time JWAB's third record appeared in 2003, Webber had joined full-time. For the live JWAB shows that followed, Webber was accompanied by McBean's longtime friend Camarind (then late of revivalist punk band the Black Halos) and Jeremy Schmidt (who'd stepped in when the band's original keyboard player left).

While McBean insists Jerk With A Bomb is still a going concern and his solo project, Pink Mountaintops, allows him to indulge his sex-rock jones, Black Mountain's weightier music requires a different environment. Downtown Eastside is home to the band's practice space as well as its day job, and the area is decidedly unforgiving: "We've brought in people from Brooklyn," McBean reports, "and they're like, 'Man, this place is fucked up.'" Many of the songs on *Black Mountain* paint similarly merciless abstract scenes: Kids scream at the television, killers roam the streets, wars fade and flare without warning. But a fragile hope runs through the album as well, provided by Webber's smooth, cool alto, as on aching ballad "Heart Of Snow": "Your sad wings can't fly you home ... You're wrong/Our hopes will not die."

Finding pockets of loveliness in the midst of decay is something McBean has learned from the PHS. "It makes you see things you just wouldn't ordinarily," he says. "I'll be talking to some guy with a lifelong addiction problem or who just did 20 years in prison and find out we both loved the same band when we were kids. Or they'll talk about how they started getting their lives back together, some tremendous story that blows me away. There's a lot of ugliness. But you also get to see the beauty in everyone."

—Eric Waggoner

Scout Niblett »Knives Out

When Emma "Scout" Niblett first answers her cell phone, her voice sounds like a flaw in the line or a hiss from the tour van as it carries her home to California. (The singer/songwriter was born in Nottingham, England, and now resides in Oakland.) A few seconds pass before the whisper takes shape, cooing softly in a British accent. Even with the volume at 11, the tape recorder barely captures it.

The irony is that Niblett is accustomed to making herself heard above a racket. On *Kidnapped By Neptune* (Too Pure), her third album, Niblett's unholy wailing and hollering overpowers aggressive, distorted guitars and Steve Albini-recorded drums with ease. The childish sweetness isn't absent, but it sounds as if she's torn it from her chest and pummeled it with drumsticks.

"The thing about performing is that you are able to express things that you don't at other times," says Niblett. "It's a really different state of mind for me than in my normal every day." Her voice trails off.

With prodding, she adds, "You're screaming your head off onstage, aren't you? There aren't many places where you can go around doing that normally." (Nor can you wear a glamorous blonde wig, an accessory that has become Niblett's trademark onstage.)

Kidnapped mixes the aggressive swagger of PJ Harvey with Built To Spill's ebullient guitar leads—the intro to "Good To Me" could've come straight from Doug Martsch—but shears away the self-confidence of either. "Valvoline" and "Safety Pants" (on which Niblett only uses drums and voice) start leisurely, then jump abruptly to painful and manic bursts of rhythm. Softer pieces such as the piano-laced "This City" waver like the voice on the phone, hushed and tentative.

Niblett detests analyzing these variances in her songs, mainly because the ragged introspection that appears throughout *Kidnapped*—as well as 2001's *Sweet Heart Fever* and 2003's *I Am*—comes from an internal process she can't explain. Songs appear to her in dream-like fragments, and she's often totally surprised by what she discovers.

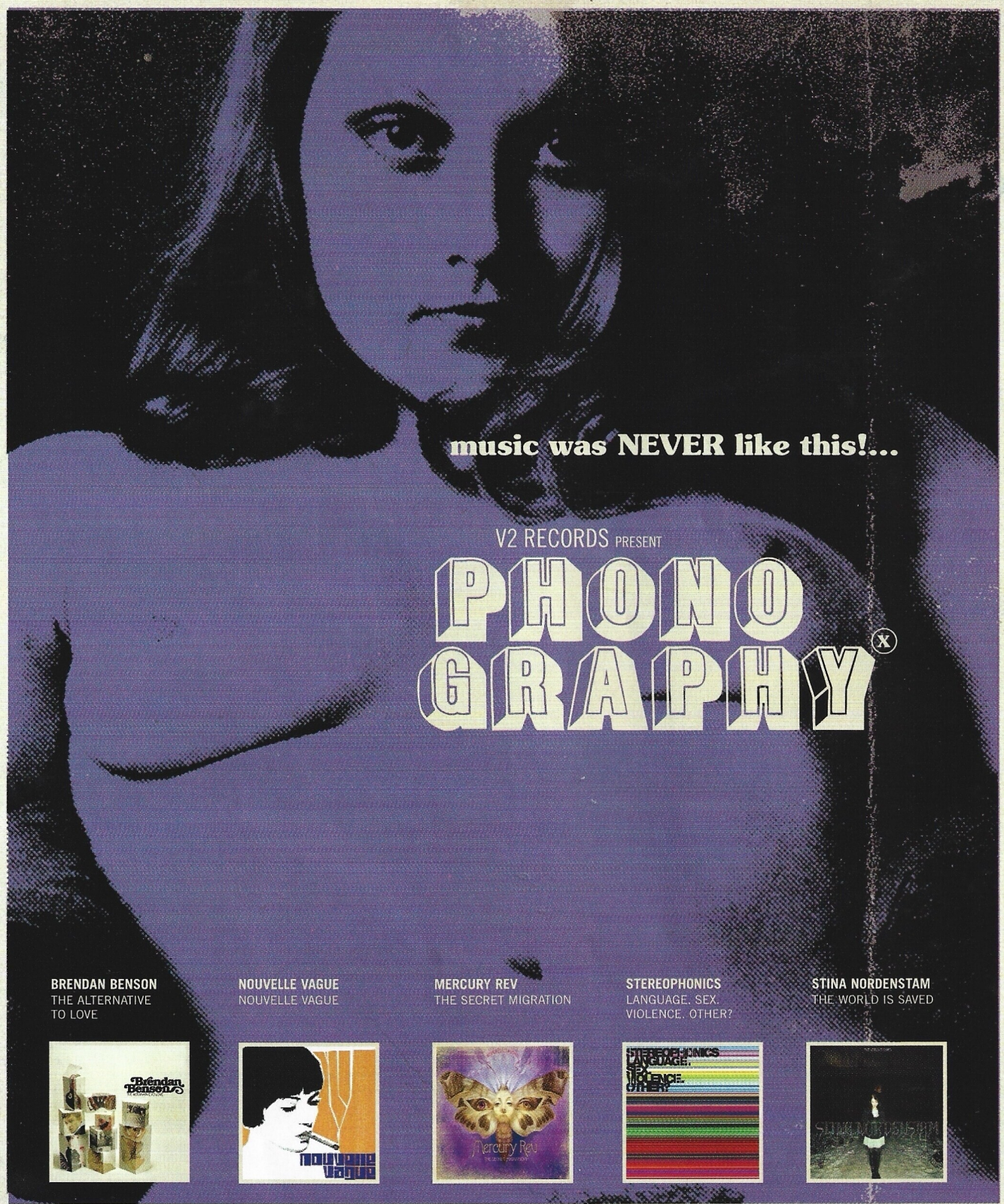
"It's not like, 'This is what I think, and therefore I'm going to write it down,'" she says. "It's more like my subconscious is writing songs for me. I'm not aware of the things I need to know until I've written the song. Songwriting informs me about my life and my view of life."

The initial inspiration for *Kidnapped* track "Lullaby For Scout In Ten Years" came when her horoscope suggested she write a song for her future self. Niblett discovered she was terrified not knowing whether she'd even be alive in that time frame. "Honey, if you're still around," she wails repeatedly, as guitars crunch around her.

Perhaps this is why there's such a discrepancy between the Niblett on *Kidnapped* and the one on the telephone: There's no space for the fragmented logic of the psyche in a one-on-one conversation. Without the anything-goes feeling that performing brings, it's impossible to tap into motivation, let alone meaning.

"Performing is always really intense," she says. "I'm always honest, I'm always myself, but it's best when I just say, 'Fuck it,' and let go completely."

—Tizzy Asher



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Des Ark » Ship Shape

Although many guitar gods have been worshiped throughout rock's history, not as many six-string goddesses have yet captured the faith of the masses. That could change when listeners get an earful of Aimee Argote, the singing, guitar-slinging half of Durham, N.C.'s Des Ark, a duo that also boasts former Milemarker drummer Tim Herzog.

The diminutive, 23-year-old Argote is one of those unique players who wrangles multiple layers of sound from her instrument, rendering a second guitarist and bassist irrelevant. Stranger still, she owes her formidable chops to stunt whales and frolicking dolphins.

"I took a couple of guitar lessons, but I just refused to ever learn notes," explains Argote. "At one point, my guitar teacher said, 'I've got this great gig at SeaWorld this weekend. If I hadn't learned notes, I never would have gotten the gig.'" Playing sidekick to Shamu was not a career goal for Argote, so she quit taking lessons and taught herself to play. The impressive results of those bedroom sessions can be heard on Des Ark's debut, *Loose Lips Sink Ships* (Bifocal Media). Fittingly, the album was recorded in the home studio of J Mascis, a guitar deity in his own right.

"I feel like his role has kind of been taken out of context," says Argote of Mascis' participation in the recording. "J would just come in and make recommendations on what microphones or guitar amps to use."

And what about Mascis' well-documented aversion to human interaction?

"He doesn't talk a lot, but he's really cool," offers Argote. "J said this thing to us when we left: [*in a deadpan voice*] 'Your record sounds rockin'."

Loose Lips does indeed rock, from post-punk/math workout "Queen Of The Sketch Patrol" to "Yes Sir, Yes Way," a slow-burn track that builds tension, then shatters it with Argote's unhinged shrieks. The bluesy stomp of "Jesus Loves You (But Yr Still Comin Home With Me Tonight)" should give the Black Keys a run for their money. Des Ark bookends these two-pronged assaults with "Some Are Love" (a pretty, fingerpicked acoustic number) and "For Bob Riecke" (a tribute to Argote's late uncle that closes *Loose Lips* with just piano and voice).

Despite this multi-dimensional approach, a lot of Des Ark's press has referred to the group as a punk-rock band. Surprisingly, Argote doesn't take exception to the descriptor. "I'm not really sure what the definition of punk music is anymore," she says. "But in terms of our politics, how we operate as a band, make decisions and live our lives, we definitely consider ourselves punks."

She does take umbrage, however, to the PJ Harvey comparisons. "I like her music, but she's really hit or miss for me," says Argote. "I guess it's the energy of the songs, or maybe it's just that she's a girl and plays guitar loudly." Actually, Harvey need not look over her shoulder for the likes of Des Ark. In a battle of the power duos, however, it's the White Stripes who better watch their back.

—Matt Ryan

(l-r): Aimee Argote, Tim Herzog

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Jeff Hanson »Voice Lessons

It's hard to find a review or profile of St. Paul, Minn., singer/songwriter Jeff Hanson that doesn't linger on two subjects: his high voice and his music's resemblance to that of a certain dead indie icon. But when someone sounds like Alison Krauss singing Elliott Smith, are you supposed to ignore it?

"I'm very confident in my singing voice," says Hanson, whose speaking voice, though gentle, shows every sign of having emerged from puberty. "I want to stand out. I can't imagine in a million years me saying I wish I could take my singing voice and make it sound like everybody else."

In the first months of 2005, Hanson released his second album and married Meghan Anzelc, whose piano adorns both the self-titled new disc and its 2003 predecessor, *Son*. He's a full-time musician, having left behind temp work and a job at a day-care center. Maybe this also will be the year that recognition of Hanson's talent outpaces curiosity about his singing and discussion of superficial ties to Smith.

Yes, the 26-year-old Hanson records for Smith's old label, Kill Rock Stars, which signed the Twin Cities songwriter on the basis of a four-song demo. He is, like the late Oscar nominee, an evangelical Beatles disciple who often plays all the instruments on his recordings and favors waltz time, uncomplicated melodies and artful key changes that subtly build and release tension. But Hanson, who spent his adolescence in a van with emo-leaning group M.I.J., is no martyr in training.

Other than Anzelc's piano, a few keyboard flourishes and cello/violin parts that he arranged, Hanson does the one-man-band thing again on the new album. Working with A.J. Mogis (Cursive, Faint), Hanson sounds equally confident whether unplugged or turned up. "This Time It Will" sways like a hayride, "Welcome Here" thumps the woofers, and opener "Losing A Year" raises the curtain on a developing grandeur that flatters his *Abbey Road* idols. Hanson's guitar playing is skilled, his drumming simple and aggressive. And his voice ... well, his voice remains limpid, haunting and eerily virginal.

"I do get confused when some (critical) reactions are that my music is an acquired taste because of my voice," says Hanson. "If I were a woman, you'd listen to the voice and say it was pretty."

Even when he was a frontman, Hanson says, reviewers confused his voice with a woman's. "That's naturally the way I've always sung," he explains, "and I started in M.I.J. when I was, like, 13. There's never been a conscious moment of deciding to sing a certain way. If you like it, you like it, and if you don't, you don't."

—Scott Wilson

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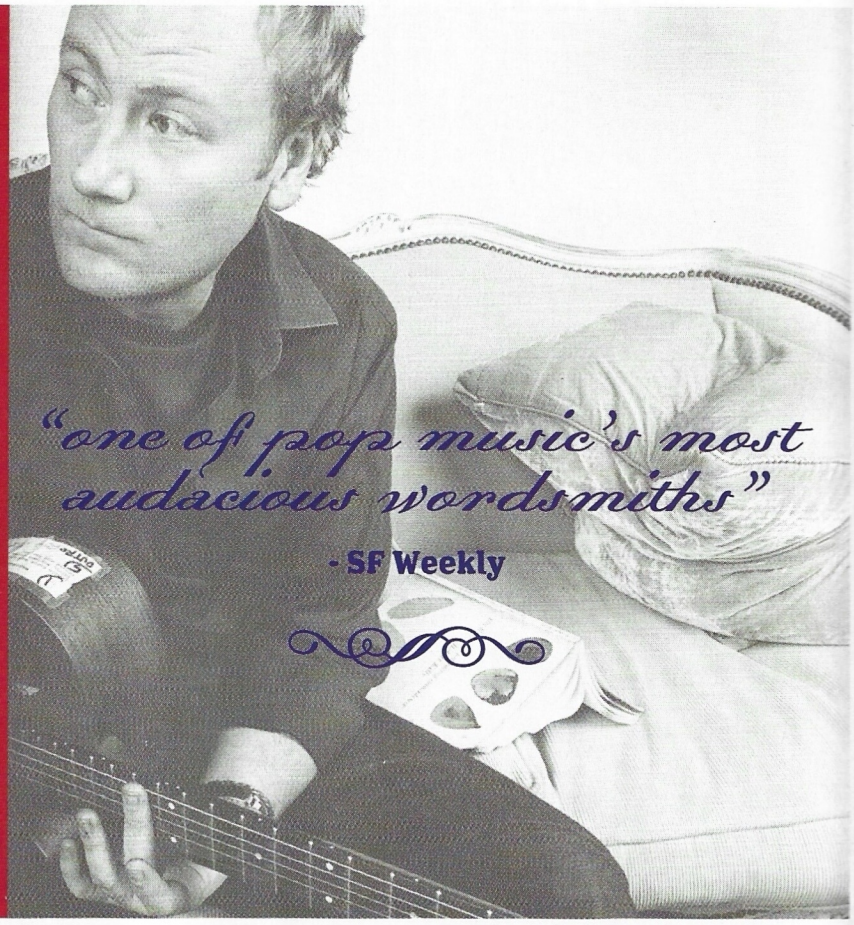

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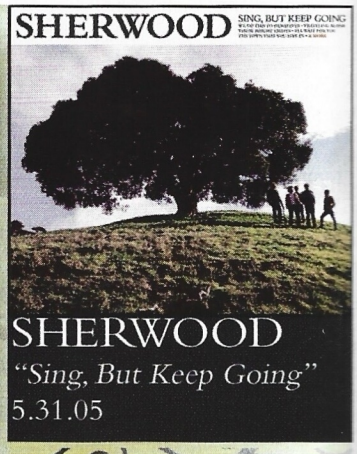

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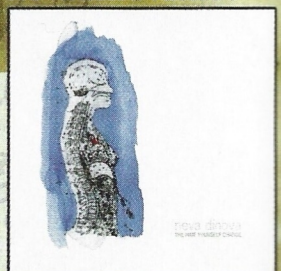

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The A-Sides are caught in a trap and they can't get out because they love you too much, baby. *Hello, Hello* (Prison Jazz), the debut album from the Philadelphia outfit, is a DayGlo-daubed roller-coaster ride laced with vaguely familiar-sounding pop anthems that cherrypick great moments from heroic bands: from the Beatles to the Raspberries, from the Who to the Cars to the Beach Boys.

Currently undergoing the same kind of growing pains experienced by the Jam during its early, Who-worship period (or the more recent struggles of jangle-rockers the Waxwings to find their own voice), the A-Sides would like to escape from this dazzling hall of mirrors without abandoning their love for catchy melodies, sugary vocal harmonies and rousing guitars.

"We all agree that was our favorite period of pop music, but now we're moving away from that," says singer/guitarist Jon Barthmus. "When I was younger, I didn't want to like any of that '60s stuff because I was rebelling. But once I got my hands on the Beatles and *Pet Sounds*, it was all over."

Barthmus is equally adept at emulating *Sgt. Pepper*-like guitar parts and Brian Wilson's soulful, "Wild Honey"-style vocals.

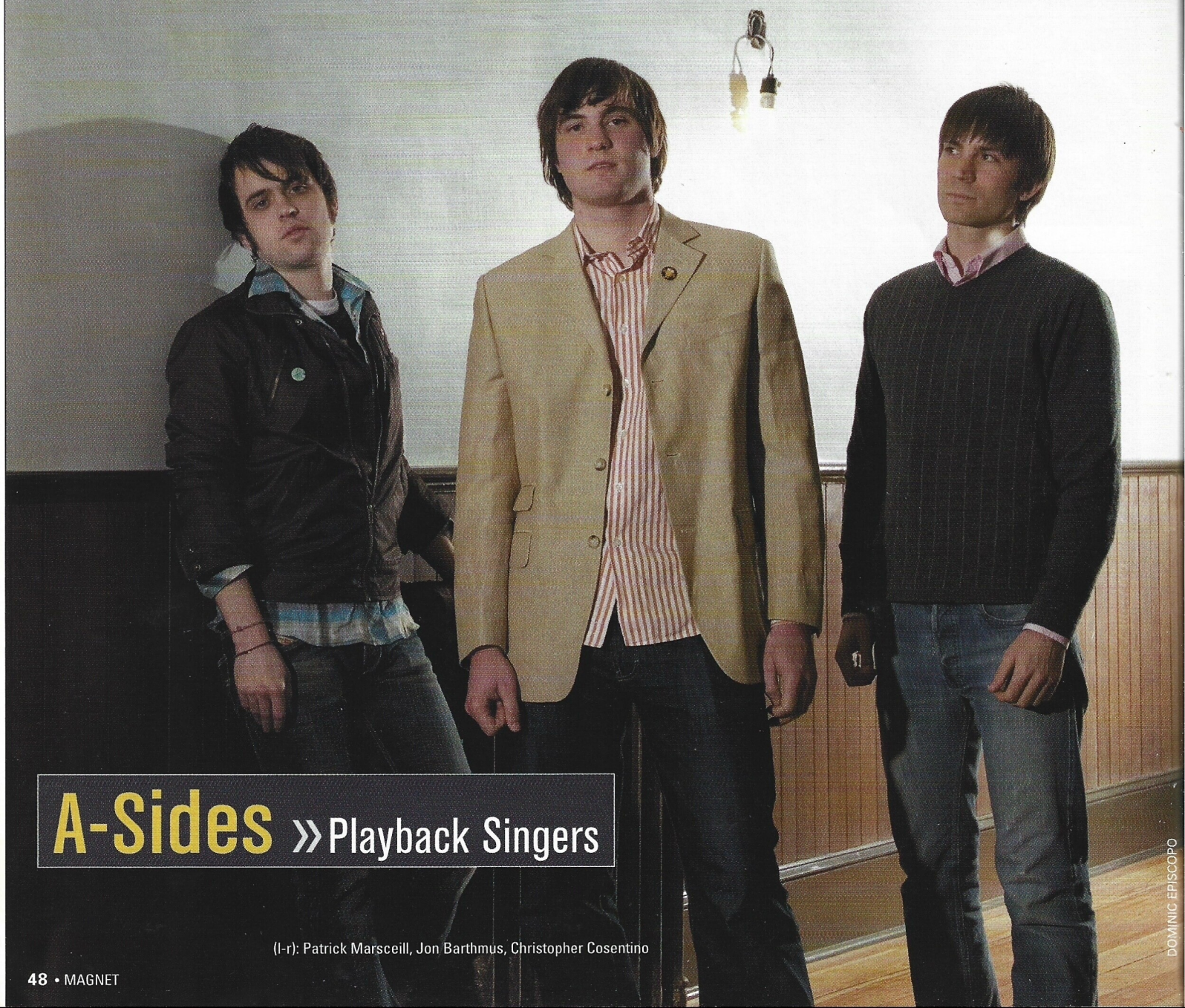
"I always thought the Beach Boys were corny and stupid, but I came to respect the hell out of them through listening to the Apples In Stereo," says drummer Patrick Marsceill, a man Barthmus describes as "addicted to endless showers and who answers his front door in the raw." According to Marsceill, bassist Mike Fleming is "a drifter and a loner" who visited Thailand and Laos right after the recent tsunami disaster. Guitarist Christopher Cosentino, he adds, was once a Hare Krishna monk. The guys call him "the doctor" because he wants to go to med school. "He's much older than the rest of us," says Marsceill. "I think he's 26."

Breaking up a poker game to speak on the phone from his Philly apartment, Marsceill is roasted by groans from the back of the room when he labels Barthmus "very wholesome. When I think of Jon, I think of nice things like kittens and puppies. But he might have a Darth Vader-like side I haven't seen yet."

Barthmus and Marsceill agree the road back to the future for the A-Sides will probably run through spacey, noisier material like *Hello, Hello* finale "Here Or There." The song displays My Bloody Valentine-like textures that contrast with its angelic, Yes-like vocal line.

"We really enjoy getting into that Spiritualized/Neutral Milk Hotel sound with lots of layers," says Marsceill. "Our producer, Brian McTear (Mazarin, Matt Pond PA), wanted that song to sound like a '90s shoegaze thing, kinda like Ride. But we'd also like to keep the more melodic stuff, too. When your music has such a strong starting point, how can you go wrong?"

—Jud Cost



(l-r): Patrick Marsceill, Jon Barthmus, Christopher Cosentino

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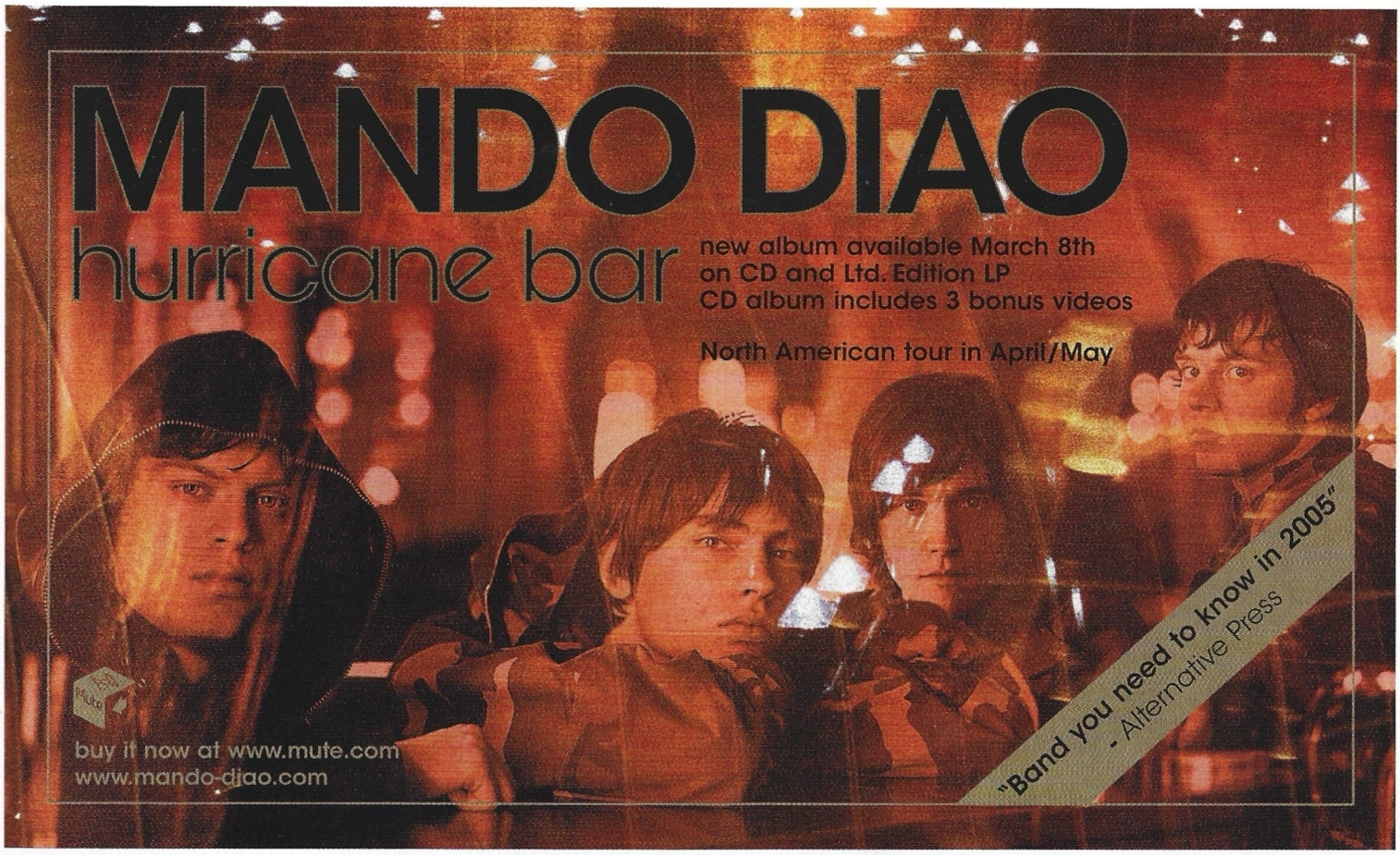
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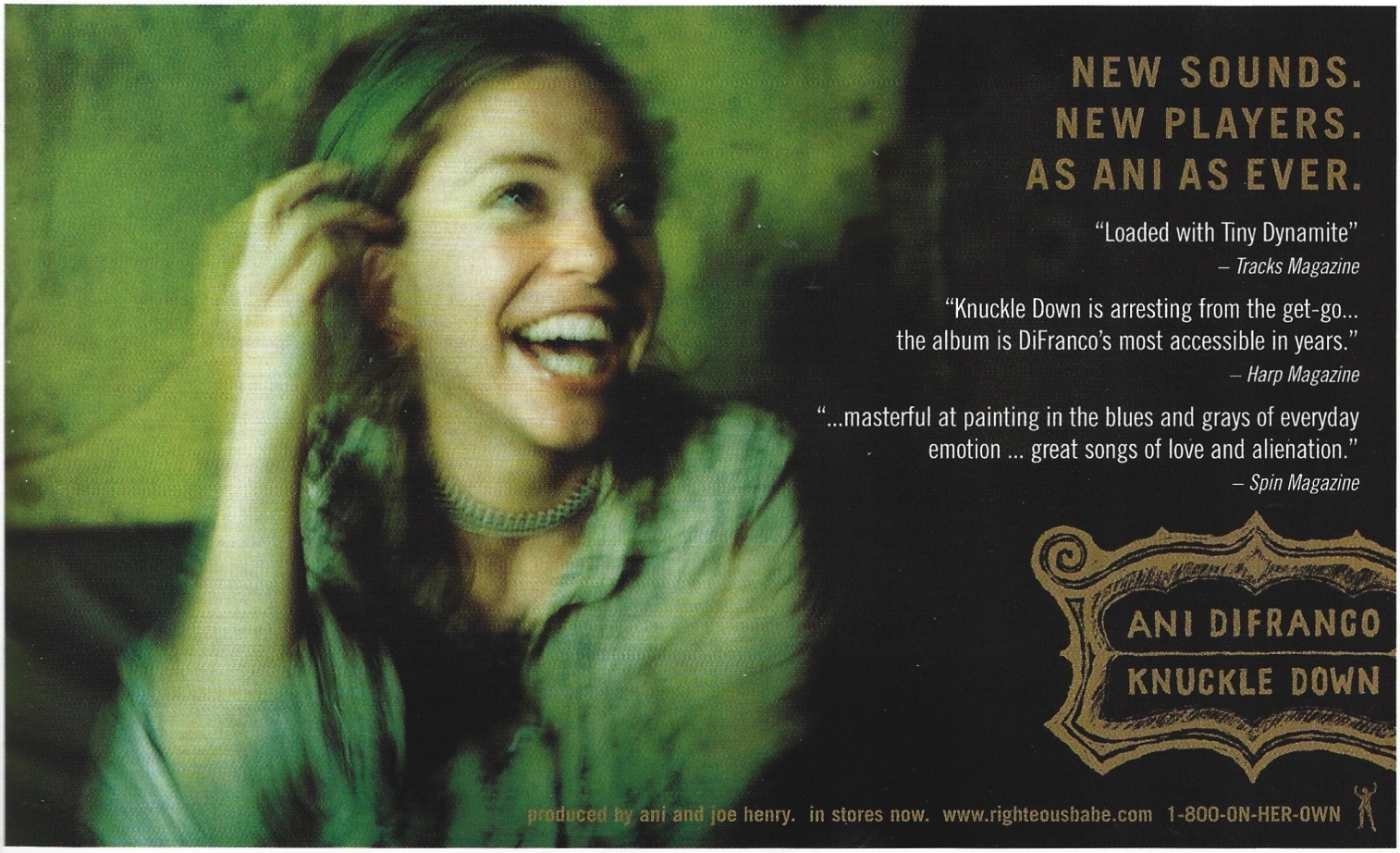
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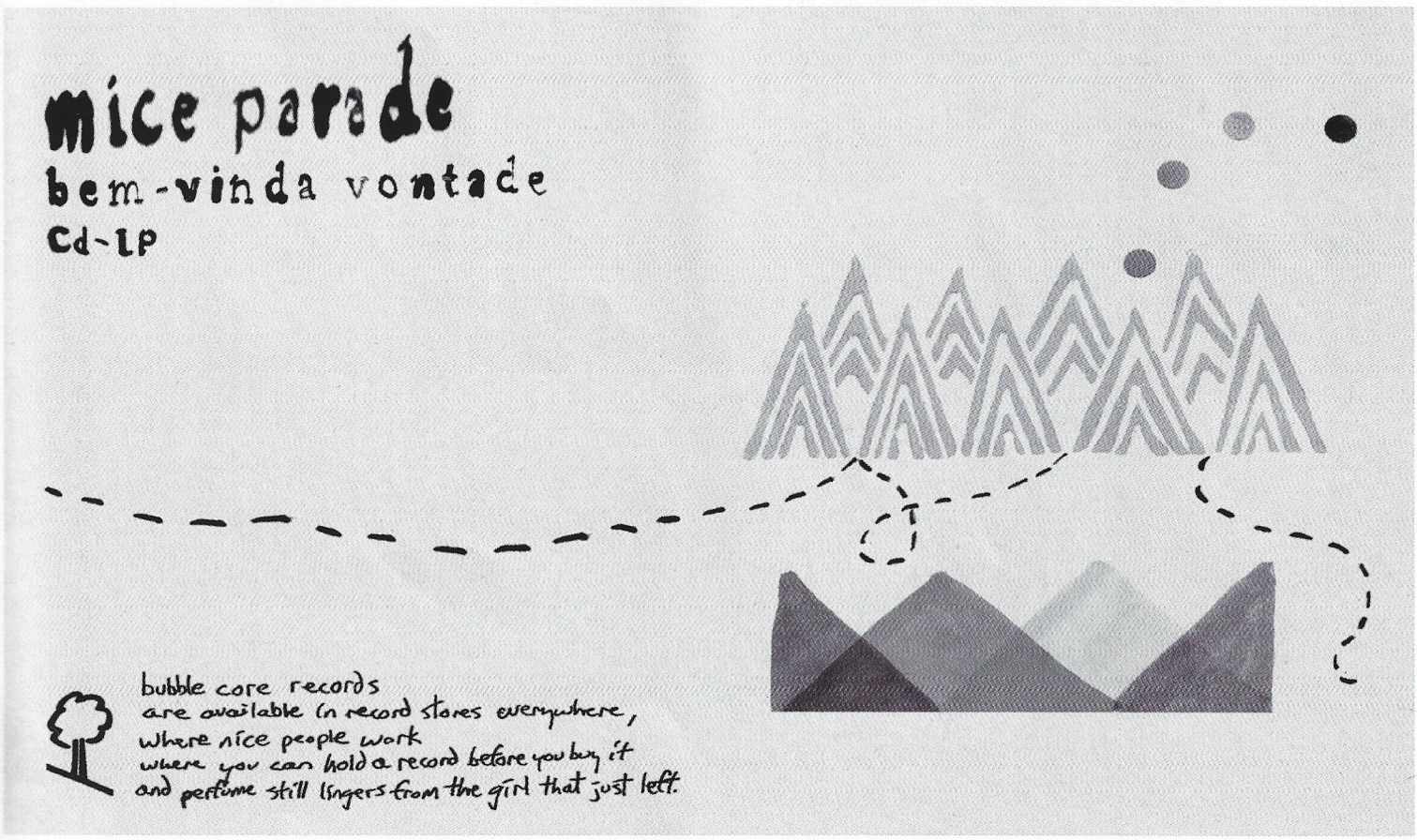
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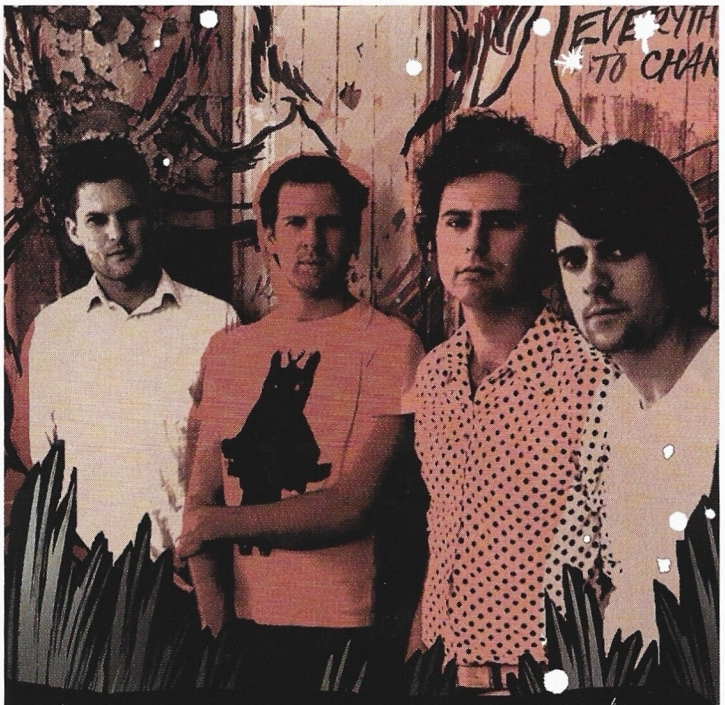

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WHAT COMES AFTER THE BLUES

eels leader Mark Everett is at the top of his game only when he's down and out.

By Tom Lanham / Photos By Joe Toreno

Dog barf. Not the most appealing substance, any way you look at it. Especially on a hot Los Angeles afternoon, when it's been baking in the sun for two, maybe three, days. Nevertheless, Mark Everett kicks his gangly legs from beneath the sidewalk-cafe table and, with an unusually cheery smile, demands that you scan his scuff-toed work boots for any traces of caked-on canine upchuck. "They're there," he chirps. "You can still see the remnants. I mean, this was no modest amount of dog vomit."

The culprit? Bobby Jr., a frankfurter-shaped hybrid of Alsatian and basset hound who's currently sprawled lazily at his master's feet. Feet that, only last week, he covered with copious amounts of regurgitation during Everett's interview with an English journalist. The scribe's tape recorder immortalized the magic moment.

"I made him play it back and it was great," says Everett. "'So tell me about blah, blah, blah on the album ... ' Then, *bleeeaaach!* And it was bad. They had to come out with a hose."

Everett's mottled mutt is an animal-shelter rescue, and he has a curious birth defect: a foreleg that faces backward. His body is long and muscular like a German shepherd's but is housed on short, basset-runty legs that end in mukluk-wide paws. Everett reckons Bobby Jr. is two years old. "But the only real way to find out is to cut him open and count the rings," he says. "And I don't wanna do that until I'm ready to eat him." He reaches down to ruffle his pet's fur and address him directly: "Oh, with you sleeping 22 hours a day, you would be such tender meat!"

Bobby Jr. looks up and, well, maybe it's just a trick of the light, but he actually appears to roll his big brown eyes in exasperation as if he's heard all these gallows-humored gags before, a zillion painful times. If there's such a thing as a dog actually understanding its owner, Bobby Jr. seems to get Everett. Or—as he's known in the music industry—E, of lugubrious (and defiantly lowercase) art-pop outfit eels. The dog even appears alongside Everett on the ambitious new eels outing—the two-disc, 33-track *Blinking Lights And Other Revelations* (Vagrant)—baying in the background of "Last Time We Spoke."

"When I walk around town, nobody notices me anymore," Everett sighs. "They just want *his* autograph. I think he has several merchandise deals in the offing."

Everett wields a razor-sharp, ultra-droll wit that isn't for every mammal. Over the course of 14 years and nine albums, the Virginia-bred songwriter has made a living out of musical misanthropy, turning tragedies such as the 1996 suicide of his sister and the 1998 death of his mother into remarkably moving, deceptively upbeat-sounding material. Rather than recoiling from death, he practically plays Twister with the Grim Reaper, just like Bill and Ted did in their *Bogus Journey*.

Everett doesn't merely laugh in the face of overwhelming melancholy—he guffaws. As he does this, the 41-year-old multi-instrumentalist always gives a subtly nuanced performance. If you're not paying close attention, you might miss the wry lyrical wink or feinting sucker-punch hook that sets his work apart from most post-Leonard Cohen melancholia.

Everett's afflictions began at an early age, probably around 1982, with the death of his father, quantum physicist Hugh Everett III, who devised the many-worlds theory. "Or, basically, the idea of parallel universes," explains his son, who soon slid into a teen truancy that led to arrests and school expulsions after his dad's passing. "He was kind of discounted as a kook at first and not given the credit he deserved, and it really put him into a lifelong depression, I think. Later, he was heralded, but too late. I just saw a *Twilight Zone* I'd never seen before about my father's theory, an hour-long episode where an astronaut goes into space, comes back to his house and wife, but everything's just a little bit off. He'd gone into another universe."

There were several *Star Trek* episodes inspired by Hugh Everett as well. "I've learned more about my father through books and magazines than I ever did living in the same house with him all those years," he says. "So with *Blinking Lights*, I wanted to write something, just in case there's anyone like me in the future who's trying to learn something about their father or grandfather via books and magazines and the Internet. Because I've read a lot of things about my father on the Internet that just weren't true. The Internet is like a bathroom wall for any idiot to write on and a million idiots to read and believe."

"WHENEVER I READ BIOGRAPHIES ABOUT CERTAIN FILMMAKERS, I ALWAYS SEEM TO IDENTIFY WITH THEIR PERSONALITIES A LOT MORE THAN MUSICAL GUYS."

The latest eels album sparked to life in 1997, after Everett had ditched a two-album solo career (1992's *A Man Called E* and the next year's *Broken Toy Shop*, both modest quirk-pop masterpieces) to form eels with bassist Tommy Walter and drummer Butch Norton, who remains a member to this day. The trio had a surprise hit with 1996 debut *Beautiful Freak* for DreamWorks and its flagship single/video, "Novocaine For The Soul." *Blinking Lights* became Everett's unfinished symphony, an eight-year project to which he kept returning after getting records such as 2003's hard-rocking *Shootenanny!* out of his system. Gradually, *Blinking Lights* grew in length from one disc to two and came to include several instrumental interludes that give it more of a soundscape feel. During the *Shootenanny!* tour, it hit him.

"I started to think about the album more like a film than a record," says Everett. "Whenever I read biographies about certain filmmakers, I always seem to identify with their personalities a lot more than musical guys." He pauses to scratch his stubble-bearded chin. "Maybe I am just a frustrated filmmaker."

Ironically, directors often seem to relate to Everett's work; eels tracks have found soundtrack slots in such unlikely places as *Shrek*, *Shrek 2* and *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*. His songs have also appeared in heavier flicks such as *American Beauty* and *The End Of Violence*, and he composed the score to 2003's *Levity*.

"The visual people really seem to like me," says Everett. "They're willing to reach out to the ghetto of artists like me simply because they like the music, when obviously whoever's in charge of the company would rather have them reach out to the J-Los. But I try to keep a lid on that as much as possible, although it's not easy."

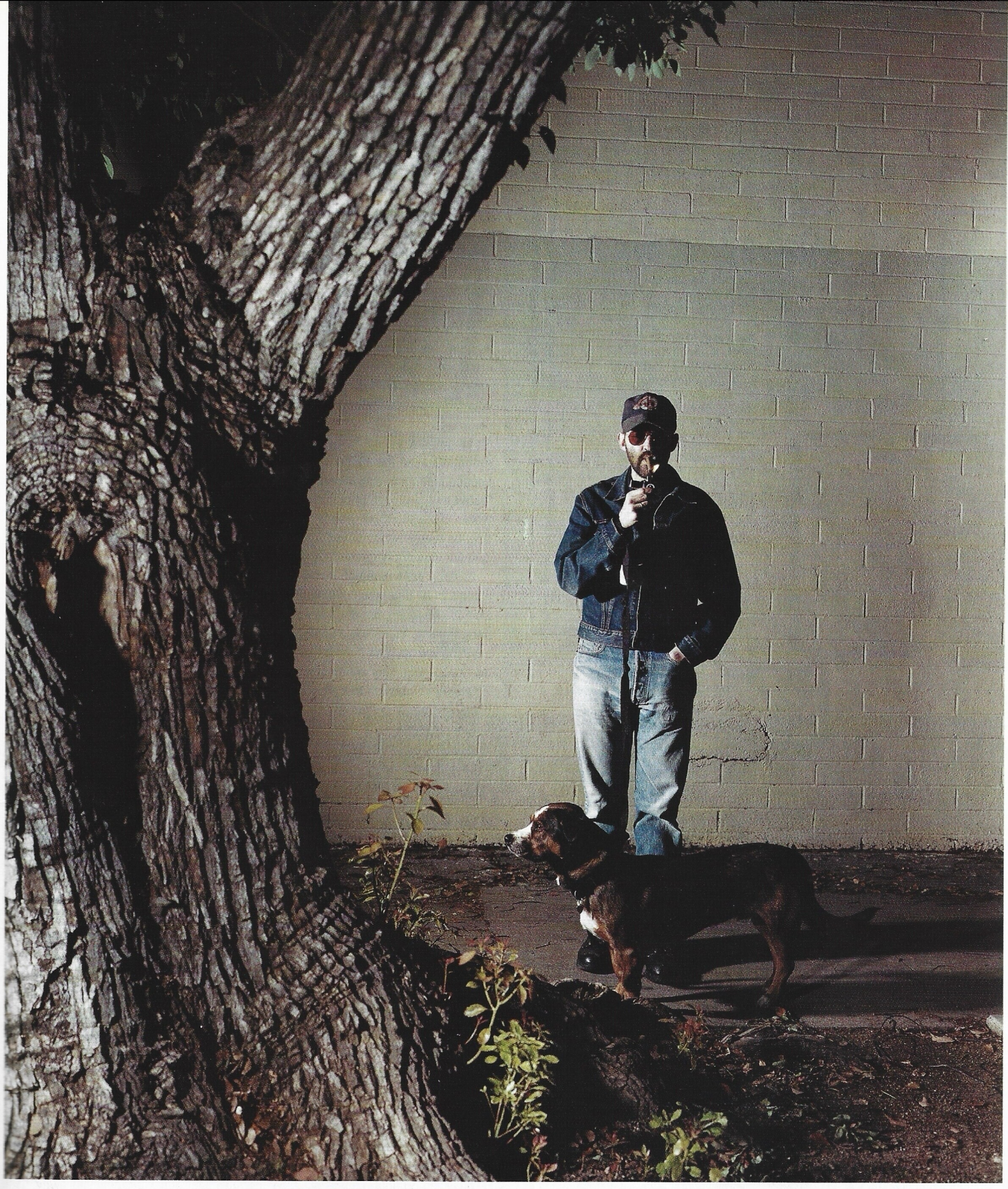
Everett is right about one thing: Passersby are quick to notice Bobby Jr. as he stretches out on the hot sidewalk. Several attractive girls stop to pet him, barely glancing up at who's holding the leash. An elderly woman ends up nose-to-nose with the pooch, purring, "Hi, good lookin'!"

"See, he *is* a lady-killer," murmurs Everett as grandma totters off. "And she even put in her good teeth for that greeting. Good boy, Bobby! Keep reelin' 'em in!"

The same stand-up-routine delivery colors much of *Blinking Lights*, elevating it from a funereal rumination on mortality to a relatively joyful celebration of life itself. On "Blinking Lights (For Me)," Everett simultaneously equates blinking lights with the comfortable flicker of an aircraft's wings and a traffic-halting car crash. He goes on to swear he's tired of living a "Suicide Life," have a graveyard picnic "In The Yard, Behind The Church," recall a final conversation with a departed loved one on "The Last Time We Spoke" and (with Tom Waits bawling baby-like in the background) create a *faux*-dance craze on '60s raveup "Going Fetal." ("Where you just give up, fall on the floor and curl up like you're in your mother's womb," sings Everett.) The first disc closes with "Checkout Blues," on which Everett, who's distantly related to the misfortune-dogged Kennedy clan, wonders, "Is the curse stronger than me?/Or am I stronger than the curse?"

Disc two of *Blinking Lights* flutters in on the bright woodwinds of "Dust Of Ages" before ricocheting to the punky pop of "Old Shit/New Shit," on which Everett, in his patented pneumatic wheeze, declares he's "tired of the old shit, let the new shit begin ... The psychic pain of living in this world is overwhelming me again and again." Everett comes to an uplifting conclusion of sorts on the last three compositions, "Last Days Of My Bitter Heart," "The Stars Shine In The Sky Tonight" and "Things The Grandchildren Should Know" (a jangly rundown of his faults and attributes). "In the end I'd like to say that I'm a very thankful man," he warbles. It sounds like hard-won insight or, at least, one of the major revelations mentioned in the album's title.

The grandchildren metaphor is a curious one. Four years ago, a heavily bearded Everett sat backstage in San Francisco during his tour for *Souljacker*, positively glowing over his brand-new bride, a Russian dentist



he'd met in Germany and only refers to as "Dr. E." He likened their union to an episode of *Green Acres*: "I've kind of become Mr. Douglas, and she's Zsa Zsa Gabor, going, 'Olivah! Olivah!' My marriage is extremely entertaining." Today, his eyes hidden behind red-lensed aviator shades, Everett isn't as forthcoming about his wife when asked how married life is treating him.

"Depends who you ask," is the curt reply.

Does his wife work?

"Why practice dentistry when you can live off *Shrek*?"

Does he participate in typical married-couple activities?

"No, not really. I stay in the house, and she goes out and does stuff without me."

But Everett admits that—just like Johnny Depp's portrayal of the reclusive J.M. Barrie, who often disappeared on his wife in pursuit of the muse, in *Finding Neverland*—his significant other "has some fundamental understanding of me that no one else does, as far as

BIRD SONG

SNOW & VOICES
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(BSCD100/Stereo)

First album by Los Angeles chanteuse Lauri Kranz and her new musical collective, Snow & Voices. A shimmering, keyboard-drenched, patch quilt of songs written about love, loss, longing and regret by someone who knows. Often sounds best at night. Produced by Darrell Thorp (ya know, Nigel Goodrich's engineer) & Jebin Bruni (Aimee Mann, Sheryl Crow, Liz Phair).

THE QUARTER AFTER
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Debut long player from Los Angeles psychedelic pop mavens, the Quarter After. Similar in style and content to the Brian Jonestown Massacre if and when they remember to take their prescription meds. Soaring vocal harmonies confronted head on by a searing, full-frontal guitar assault. Produced by Rob Campanella (Brian Jonestown Massacre, the Tyde, Mia Doi Todd). On tour in July 2005 with Brian Jonestown Massacre.

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Circling The Sun
(Parasol)

With tambourines shaking and guitars chiming the third CD from SF-area pop stalwarts writes a new chapter in the California Sound.

DAVID FRIDLUND
Amaterasu
(Hidden Agenda)

Stateside release for David & The Citizen frontman David Fridlund's debut solo album, paired with long-time partner, vocalist Sara Cutler.

THE JAN MARTENS FRUSTRATION
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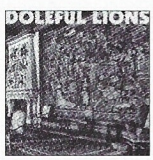
(Hidden Agenda)

Debut album of sweltering garage rock from Gothenburg combo. Features guest appearances from members of The Hellacopters and The Soundtrack of Our Lives.



DOLEFUL LIONS
Shaded Lodge & Mausoleum
(Parasol)

Equal parts bedroom melancholy and comic book bravado, the Doleful Lions' fifth album replaces harmonies and occult whimsies with stark folk atmospheres.

KEVIN TIHISTA
Home Demons
(Parasol)

14 unreleased tracks from the bedroom studio. The Chicago Reader named Kevin Tihista's "Wake Up Captain" the #1 Chicago release of 2004 and UK's UNCUT voted it one of the year's Top 60 titles.

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"MY NEVERLAND IS THE BASEMENT, AND WHAT HAPPENS DOWN THERE IS WHAT YOU HEAR ON THE RECORD."

how I live my life and my method of working. And that's the nice thing about my situation: It's pretty well understood at this point that I do disappear. My Neverland is the basement, and what happens down there (in the home studio) is what you hear on the record. It's no big mystery."

When asked if his household might soon echo with the sound of children, Everett, as usual, retreats to the defense of drollery. "I'm gonna go straight to the grandchildren," he smirks. "How? I don't know all the details yet, but I'm working on it. I mean, I figured out how to put out a 33-track double album in 2005. I can figure out how to have grandchildren without having children. If anybody can do it, I can."

No longer under contract with DreamWorks, Everett paid for *Blinking Lights* himself, recruiting some friends along the way. (Like Waits, Peter Buck and John Sebastian popped in for cameos.) Everett says the set could've been twice as long, but he perfected a recording method that allowed him to whittle it down to size: two intense weeks in the studio, two weeks out to edit himself, following this back-and-forth routine for nearly all of last year. When Everett approached the Vagrant label with his concept for a double album, he came prepared.

"I did a little research in my defense and found that some of the best-selling albums of all time were double albums," he says. "You'd think it's Pink Floyd's *Dark Side Of The Moon*, but it's *The Wall*. Because usually, if you walk into a record company and say, 'I've made a double album,' and you start to explain it, they don't hear anything you say after the first sentence. All they hear is their own voice saying, 'This isn't happening! This *isn't* happening!'"

Vagrant's reaction to Everett's magnum opus wasn't exactly jaw-dropping. "We'd done it before with Paul Westerberg," says company president/co-owner Rich Egan. "He came in our door going, 'I've got a double record, and I'm not cutting anything!' And I'm not gonna tell Westerberg to cut anything, so I'm certainly not gonna tell E to cut anything, either. I thought it was really important to present the eels record as a whole, because it's such a journey."

"I'm not one of those guys who thinks everything he does is great and should come out," clarifies Everett. "It's just that once I started to think about this as a film, I wanted to give it more space. I know it's a tall order to expect anyone to listen to a double album now. But when I hear talk about the death of the album as a form and how everybody's just downloading their favorite songs, it kind of sends me in the opposite direction. Like, 'All right, it's time for a double album. Somebody must need it more than ever now.'"

If you can take him at his word about *Blinking Lights*, it almost sounds like Everett is actually starting to enjoy himself, at least a little bit. Which isn't bad for a guy who dismisses God and the afterlife as mere fairy tales.

"I don't believe in any of that stuff the way a lot of people do," he says. "But there are certain moments of beauty that happen, particularly for me in music, that I can't explain the magic. It's nice when a non-believer has to question his doubts, you know?"

Everett points with his fork at the last remaining bite of the spinach-and-cheese croissant he's been polishing off. "You've gotta start having fun in life, and that's what I've been trying to do a little more," he says. "Now when they say, 'There's a lot of cheese in that croissant, monsieur. Are you sure you want to order it?' I'm like, 'Fuck it! Gimme *extra* cheese!' With my genes, chances are I'm not gonna make it much longer, anyway. And I would hate to end up on my deathbed thinking, 'Why didn't I order the cheese?'

Everett and Bobby Jr. get ready to hoof it to their house a few blocks away. "But man, look at me," he invites one final time. "My only friend is a dog. A typical night at the Everett estate is me with a big glass of whiskey, slurring to the dog, 'You're the only one who *undershtandsh* me, man! I fuckin' love you, man! Now, gimme a big kiss! No, with more tongue!'"

In response, Bobby Jr. looks up at his malcontent musical master and lets out a resounding "rowf" that rattles the cafe windows. Whiskey and tongue it is. **M**

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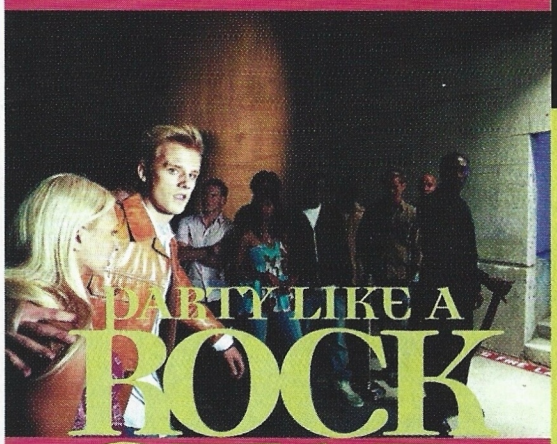

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M. Ward just wasn't made for these times. In an age of information and technology, the vintage-sounding singer/songwriter is an old-fashioned mystery.

The Simple Life

By Jonathan Valania
Photos By Brennan Cavanaugh

WE'VE ALL HEARD THE MYTHIC TALE OF ROBERT Johnson's Faustian bargain with the Devil, struck at the crossroads under a Delta moon. Let's imagine for a moment that it's another night at that crossroads. On this night, the Devil is busy with other things, perhaps plotting the eventual rise of Slayer. And Johnson, well, he's long since given the Devil his due, probably having second thoughts as to whether unlimited pussy, corn liquor and a little plantation-rock stardom was worth eternal damnation as he shovels another load of coal into hell's blast furnace.

On this night, two moonlit figures converge at that very same crossroads, both cut into shadow, both carrying guitars. Their names—Skip James and Nick Drake—mean little at the time, but history will be kind to them, affording them both an afterlife of influence and respect that will eclipse their humble careers and troubled lives. They pause and eye each other tensely. While James would surely not be surprised to learn the Devil is a white man, one look into Drake's doleful eyes confirms the obvious: It ain't him. James tips his hat politely and rambles on into the humid Southern night. Somewhat puzzled by the encounter, Drake waits around for a few moments before he, too, gives up and moves on.

But what if it didn't go down like that? What if Louis Armstrong were the Devil? What if he showed up on that night with a horse-leg-sized blunt of his beloved muggles? What if James and Drake sat down for a spell, passed the peace pipe and took out their guitars and traded songs? What would it have sounded like if James' kicked-dog blues and Drake's folksy melancholia got tangled up on a warm Delta breeze? Well, the short answer is M. Ward.

> "In Matt's music, you can hear the residue of a lifer: someone who is going to be around for a long time making music no matter what." —Howe Gelb

Assuming you just walked in on this movie, let's get you up to speed: Matthew Stephen Ward is a spellbinding troubadour with a velvet fog of a voice who, over the course of four albums, has spun gossamer blues and lullaby folk into critic's gold. He's got a big head of Dylan hair that he usually tucks under a well-worn feedcap, casting a shadow over a grin that makes him look like he just ate the canary. Onstage, he hunches over his guitar like a scarecrow and moves like a Krazy Kat cartoon flickering in black and white. If he were a movie, it would be *Ironweed*. If he were a band, it would be called Blind Lemon Jefferson Airplane.

Not for nothing did Giant Sand's Howe Gelb reach into his own pocket and pull out the scratch to release Ward's 2000 debut, *Duet For Guitars #2*, on his Ow Om label. Not for nothing did Matador Records co-owner/indie tastemaker Gerard Cosloy give out copies of Ward's 2001 album, *End Of Amnesia*, to friends for Christmas. Not for nothing did Bright Eyes' Conor Oberst invite Ward on the road, along with My Morning Jacket's Jim James, for last year's traveling hootenanny of onstage woodshedding and verse-trading.

Ward, as understated in person as he is on record, would never tell you these things. You'd have to drag it out of him over the course of many conversations—in person, on the phone, over Chinese, sifting side-by-side through record-store bins—and even then he wouldn't tell you everything, and eventually you'd have to ask his best friend. Ward is far too modest and reserved to participate in anything as gauche as his own myth-making. As he puts it so aptly on "Fuel For Fire" from the new and altogether splendid *Transistor Radio* (Merge), Ward seems to prefer to let "the uncomfortable pauses between famous last words" define him. As is the prerogative of any self-respecting musician, Ward politely declines to entertain any line of questioning that might box him into some rock critic's preconceived category. Freak folk? Alt-country-politan? Do you like Neil Young? C'mon, I know you like Neil Young.

"Journalists can write whatever they want to write, and they should do just that," says Ward to any number of inquiries that might lend context and clarity to his soft-focus folk/blues.

"He's just thoughtful, and he knows what not to say," says John King, who's created the cover art for all of Ward's albums. King is a friend and collaborator who met Ward a decade ago in the sleepy beachside city of San Luis Obispo, perched halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Both had recently secured B.A.s in English from nearby California Polytechnic and bonded over rock esoterica as they settled into post-college drift, working shifts behind the counter at the cool local mom-and-pop store, Boo Boo Records.

"You can learn a lot about records in a record store," says Ward with his characteristic drollery, absently poking at a steamed dumpling in a Philadelphia restaurant. Aside from an abiding appreciation for Bach and cellist Pablo Casales (provided by his mother), a deep connection to the haunted-hillbilly arias of Roy Orbison and Johnny Cash (courtesy of his father) and an encyclopedic understanding of the complete Beatles catalog (thanks to his older brother), Ward's taste in music rarely strayed far from the usual classic-rock suspects.

While at Cal Poly, King was the music director of KCPR, the college's influential radio station, where he dug deep into the vast reserves of obscure vinyl nestled in the studio vaults, schooling himself and Ward in the outer limits of rock and its tangled roots in country, blues, folk, jazz and the avant garde.

"Growing up in the Southern California suburbs, you think you know all about music," says King. "And then you start wading through the station's vaults and realize you don't know anything about music. I think Matt's experience was pretty much the same."

King began mentoring his friend, passing along albums by Vic Chesnutt and Ali Farka Toure and urging him to pore over sacred rock-snob texts like John Fahey's 1965 album *The Transfiguration Of Blind Joe Death*. Fahey—abstract acoustic-guitar expressionist, drifter, hermit, some say sorcerer—did for the blues, folk and other American primitive idioms what Duchamp did for nudes descending staircases: He invented a style of sonic portraiture utilizing clean, painterly chordal lines to illustrate the concentric circles of motion and being, managing to suggest the ancient, the immediate and the infinite all at once. Though Fahey is heralded as one of the great fingerstyle guitarists of the 20th century, his itinerant 40 years of music-making bears the bite marks of as many hellhounds on his trail as any Delta-bluesman mythos.

Fahey would have a huge impact on Ward's development as a songwriter, but there was a revelation just prior to his discovery of Fahey that would prove to be the key in the lock. For Christmas, King gave Ward a collection of old-timey folk/blues. It included a recording of a sepia-toned septuagenarian singer/fingerpicker named Elizabeth Cotten, who spent most of her life as a cleaning lady. The song—creaky, forlorn and otherworldly, which is all the more shocking considering it was written when Cotten was all of 12 years old—is called "Freight Train." It has earned inclusion in the canon of American folk songs ("Freight Train" has been covered by Pete Seeger and catalogued by the Smithsonian), and perhaps more importantly, it just about blew Ward's mind.

Ward has been making music since he taught himself to play his brother's unused acoustic when he was 15. "It was just sitting there in the closet," he says. "If he had ever bothered to pick it up, I probably would have never learned to play guitar."

Ward taught himself guitar by running down the Beatles songbook from front to back. He bought Neil Young's *Ragged Glory* and worked his way back to Buffalo Springfield. By the time he got to college, he was playing in a band called Rodriguez, which achieved a bit of local renown with its Minutemen-like genre-splatter. Jason Lytle of Grandaddy, then considered just another band from California's Central Valley, liked Rodriguez enough that he offered to produce its album. King wanted to put it out and passed the hat at Rodriguez gigs to come up with the money. Lytle gave a copy of the recording, titled *Swing Like A Metronome*, to Howe Gelb, who liked what he heard. Ward thinks otherwise. "There was a

(Rodriguez) album, but not one I'm particularly proud of," he says dismissively. "Let's put it this way: I prefer not to listen to it."

It was around this time when Cotten's little train song hit like an atom bomb. "Up until then, Matt had been playing with a guitar pick," says King. "He stopped after that and just started playing with his fingers, which is a whole different animal. I was going through a pretty heavy John Fahey period, and I kept putting that bird in Matt's ear." The bird could sing. Immediately taken with *The Transfiguration Of Blind Joe Death*, Ward began digging deep into Fahey's back catalog: *The Dance Of Death & Other Plantation Favorites*, *The Yellow Princess*, *The Voice Of The Turtle*, *America*.

"First of all, the idea of creating dozens of records with just one guitar seemed radical to me," says Ward. "And the way Fahey put history into his records was inspiring. The way he was able to break down time with his records."

"I think it really opened Matt's eyes to what he could be doing with his music by simplifying," says King. "One time we went to see Fahey play at this little bar out in the sticks here in Oregon. I just remember Fahey sitting there in his shorts, big belly, Santa beard and sunglasses, taking bites of his Chinese takeout between songs."

"What a strange show that was," recalls Ward. "Truly excellent. As I recall, he did eat dinner onstage. It was the epitome of casualness."

By 1999, Ward had had enough of San Luis Obispo. He moved to Chicago and took a job teaching kids with learning disabilities how to read, a calling that's sort of like the Peace Corps for English majors. In his downtime, he started four-tracking at a feverish pace. As with Rodriguez, the tapes were eventually passed around to friends, including Lytle and, eventually, Gelb.

"It had that certain flavor that occurs when something sounds as if it should always have been around," says Gelb. "It was the same flavor that I had got from Jason when he gave me his cassette tape of his band Grandaddy several years prior to stumbling across Matt. In that flavor, you can hear the residue of a lifer: someone who is going to be around for a long time making music no matter what, as if they can't help it. It is a rare thing still. And it is always a fortunate feeling to be lucky enough to feel that flavor again in such hidden corners of happenstance. The perk is that it is a very sweet feeling to think that my own sonic mess can ever attract that kind of splendor. It allows you to feel a little more sane in an insane world."

In the meantime, Ward moved to Seattle and, eventually, Portland, Ore., joining a number of old friends from the San Luis Obispo days, including King and musician/studio whiz Adam Selzer, who had opened a recording studio called Type Foundry. Selzer invited Ward to come down from Seattle to record, coaxing him into taking up residence in Portland. *Duet For Guitars #2* was recorded there.

"Matt is an inventive guitar player—his chord vocabulary is amazing—as well as a gifted songwriter," says Selzer, whose folk/rock combo Norfolk And Western serves as Ward's backing band on tour. "Most people are one or the other."

Gelb invited Ward to come along on a tour of Europe, opening the shows and playing lap-steel guitar in the Giant Sand orchestra. A one-off deal from the Future Farmer label was proffered, resulting in the release of *End Of Amnesia*.

"Much like Howe Gelb, Tom Waits, Neil Young, John Fahey and Bob Dylan before him, Matt has a pretty distinctive voice and point of view, without necessarily sounding like any of the above," says Cosloy. "If you hadn't met him or seen a photograph, you wouldn't know if he was 20 or 60. You'd also have no idea what his next album is likely to sound like no matter how much time you might have spent listening to the one prior. I mean, the songsmith/troubadour thing is a pretty sickening cliché. Matt renders that sort of thing a non-issue because his best songs are as likely to make you laugh as they are capable of cutting you in two. He's also a ridiculously great guitarist. And yes, it's true that I gave *Amnesia* to several friends as Christmas gifts. I'm cheap, so shoot me."

Thanks in part to Cosloy's enthusiasm, Ward's 2003 album, a moody masterwork called *The Transfiguration Of Vincent*, would come out on Merge. (Matador is Ward's European label.) *The Transfiguration Of Vincent* is a concept album of sorts, a meditation on death, grief, acceptance and, ultimately, transcendence. Death is a door, not a room, it seems to be saying. Typically, Ward is reluctant to interpret any of the songs and turns positively Sphinx-like when asked about the identity of the titular Vincent.

MAGNET: This Vincent person is dead?

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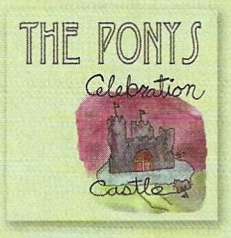

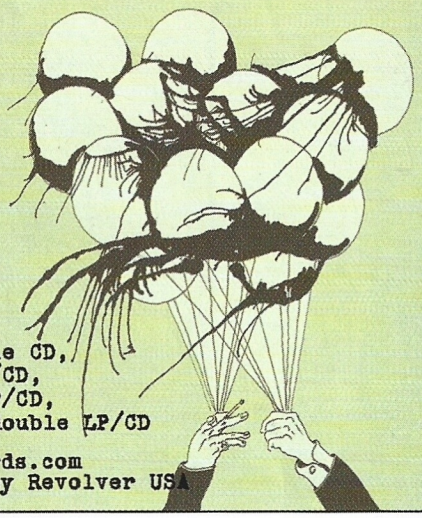

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Ward: Yes.
MAGNET: Is he someone you know or a figure out of history?
Ward: Yes.
MAGNET: That was a multiple-choice question. That's not an answer.
Ward: I just don't have that strong a desire to interpret songs for people.

All of Ward's associates have apparently been sworn to keep Vincent's identity a secret, although King does hint that he was "someone close" to Ward. The only real clue that might help solve the mystery of Vincent's identity is found on "O'Brien/O'Brien's Nocturne," *End Of Amnesia*'s closing track. If that song has any basis in reality, Vincent O'Brien was a good friend from back in the day who played guitar and swapped songs with Ward. "He said he's got a new song to show ya,

> "The idea of creating dozens of records with just one guitar seemed radical to me."

though it probably ain't gonna blow your mind," Ward sings. "And the thing about O'Brien was, he could always make the string buzz like it was 1989/And I remember my old car and that old girlfriend of mine."

Aside from the enduring mystery of O'Brien, *Transfiguration* is notable for a truly revelatory interpretation of David Bowie's "Let's Dance." Ward strips away the bombastic '80s production of the original and reveals the gorgeous, folksy torch song underneath. It's one of the rare occasions when a cover version outshines the original. (By my count, this is the second time it's happened to Bowie, the first being Nirvana's live take on "The Man Who Sold The World.") Ward is, of course, low-key about the significance of this.

"A good song can survive bad production," says Ward. "I just always loved that song."

"He really does like that song," says King. "To me it was like he had somehow made a good song out of a bad song, but to him, it was just a different version of a good song."

This was no fluke. Ward has an almost alchemical ability as an interpreter to transmute shit into gold, which he reprised recently for the second volume of *Sweetheart* (a Starbucks collection of love songs), forcing the listener to rethink Pete Townshend's "Let My Love Open The Door."

"Another song that I don't particularly like, and he did the same thing," says King. "He made a crappy '80s song feel like a '40s Cole Porter song."

Along with Ward's vintage-sounding originals, *Transistor Radio* has its fair share of time-tripping (or "collapsing time," as Ward calls it), intended to sound like a radio dial spinning across eras. There's a gorgeous, Fahey-esque acoustic-guitar reading of *Pet Sounds* classic "You Still Believe In Me." A gently fuzzed-out take on "Sweethearts On Parade," written in 1928 by Carmen Lombardo (brother of Guy) and Charles Newman. A folkadelic trip through the Carter Family's "Oh, Take Me Back," which dates back to 1938. And there's a fingerpicked reading of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier," which is from the 18th century.

"The idea is to create a nostalgia for times that never really existed," says King, "where the future and the past trade hats."

In other words, where Cole Porter wears M. Ward's feedcap and kicks it old school at the hootenanny, throwing down a little Bach and Carter Family and nobody raises an eyebrow. Where good songs by great songwriters can be freed from the prison of their dated production values and transported into the 21st century, where they will sound older than dirt and fresher than a newborn. It all happens out on some dreamscape Delta of the mind that Ward is remarkably adept at evoking, a place where Skip James and Nick Drake can have a hoedown under a pink moon. Where Louis Armstrong is the Devil and, it turns out, the Devil ain't such a bad a guy after all, rolling the joints, tapping his foot and taking the third verse himself. What a wonderful world that would be. **M**

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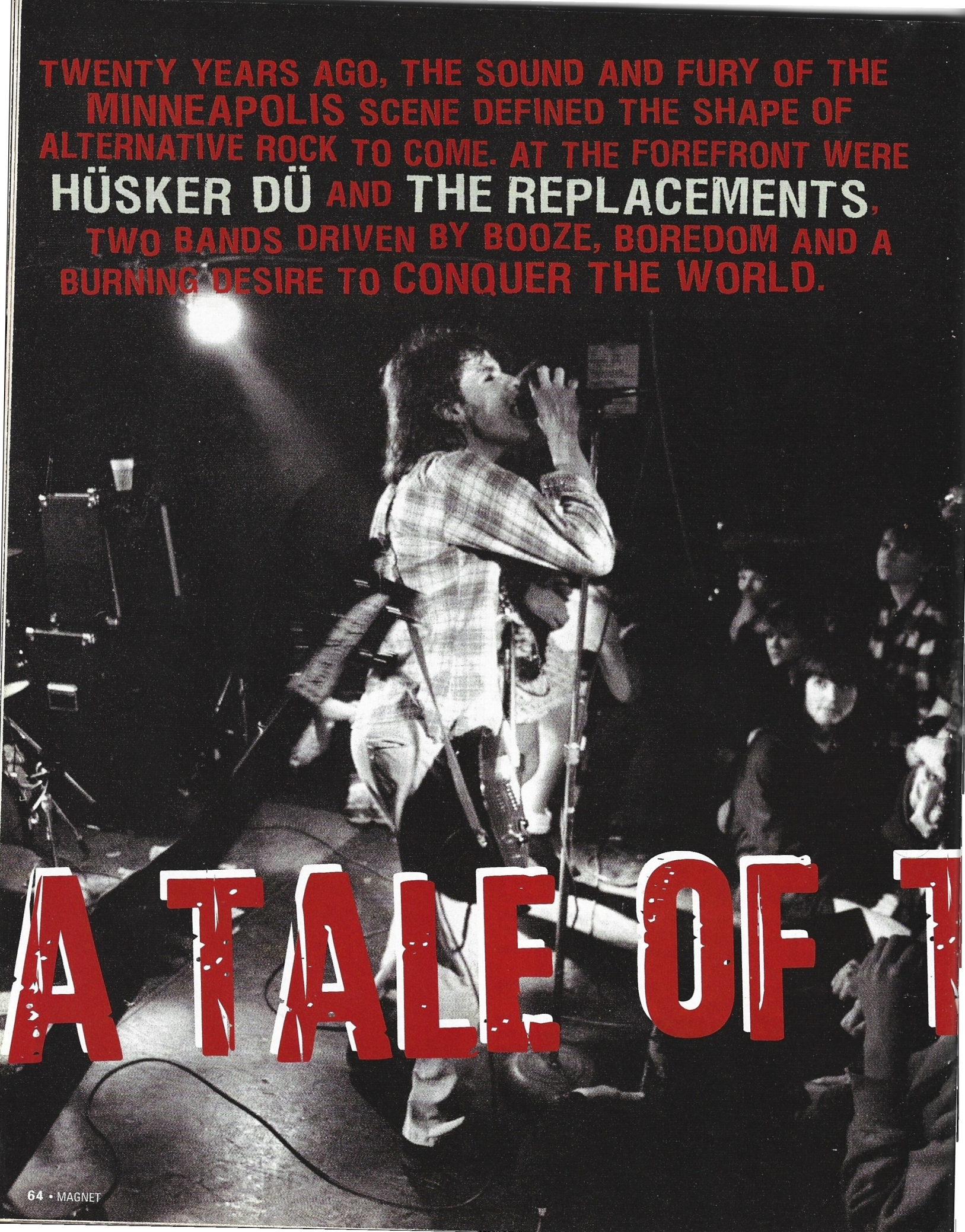
TWENTY YEARS AGO, THE SOUND AND FURY OF THE MINNEAPOLIS SCENE DEFINED THE SHAPE OF ALTERNATIVE ROCK TO COME. AT THE FOREFRONT WERE HÜSKER DÜ AND THE REPLACEMENTS, TWO BANDS DRIVEN BY BOOZE, BOREDOM AND A BURNING DESIRE TO CONQUER THE WORLD.



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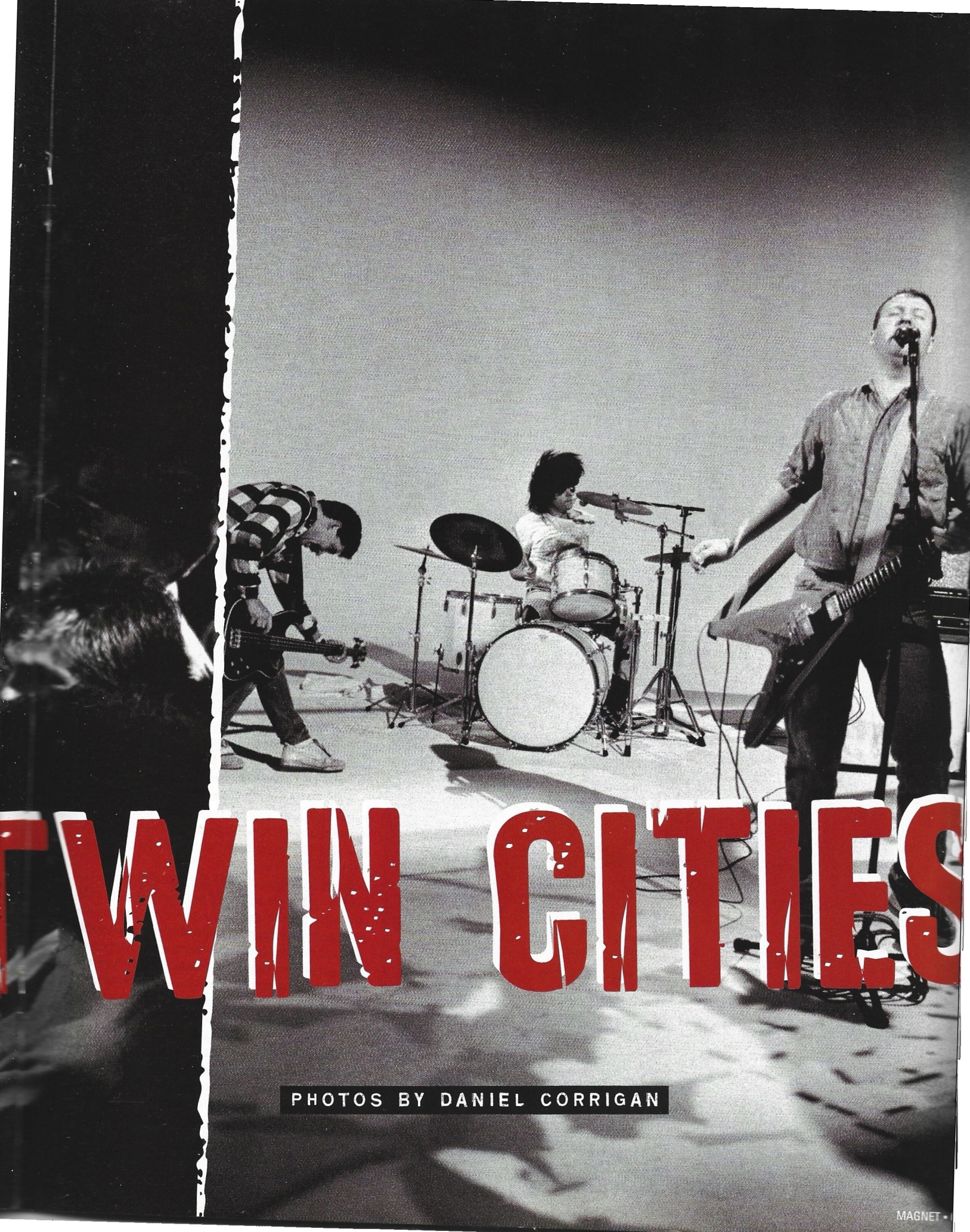


TWIN CITIES

PHOTOS BY DANIEL CORRIGAN

For a few years in the mid-'80s, not long after Athens and sometime before Seattle, the epicenter of American underground rock was Minneapolis. Before Prince came along, the northern city was mostly known for being really cold. ("Funkytown," a number-one hit for Lipps, Inc. in 1980, is an expression of boredom with Minneapolis and the urge to get the hell out of there.) But genius can put any town on the map, which Prince accomplished for his home city with 1984 album and film *Purple Rain*, whose prominent concert footage was shot at a local club called First Avenue.

Though they played the same venues as Prince, the spotlight wasn't necessarily looking for Hüsker Dü and the Replacements. Given the groups' determination and originality, the Hüskers and the Mats—who both evolved from Minneapolis' do-it-yourself punk scene—would've existed anywhere, anytime.

Formed in 1979, Hüsker Dü believed in speed. But the band's breakneck tempos—a velocity that's been attributed to the trio's amphetamine use—could barely conceal the pop melodies put forth by singer/guitarist Bob Mould and singer/drummer Grant Hart. Musically, the two-headed songwriting team was a great success; personally, it was a disaster. Whether due to opposing personalities or too much time spent in close quarters (the band recorded and toured constantly), Mould and Hart eventually became bitter enemies. (Mould and Hart are gay; despite persistent rumors, they claim they never dated.) Hüsker Dü, which also included bassist Greg Norton, imploded on the road in December 1987, when Hart's heroin use prompted the band to cancel its last two dates of the tour. Furious, Hart quit the group; Mould threw in the towel the next month. Since, Mould has released a handful of albums, including three successful outings with Sugar in the early '90s. Hart has also released post-Hüsker records (solo and with Nova Mob) as well working as a visual artist. Norton played briefly with an outfit called Grey Area before concentrating on a career as a chef.

If listeners hadn't heard anything quite like Hüsker Dü, they sure hadn't seen anything quite like the Replacements. The band also began in 1979, with the lineup of singer/guitarist Paul Westerberg (a wry, wickedly funny songwriter), guitarist Bob Stinson (a lovable, if troubled, cut-up), bassist Tommy Stinson (Bob's 12-year-old brother) and drummer Chris Mars (the quiet one). The Replacements drank more than any other band, ever, and their live shows were accordingly either epiphanies or trainwrecks. The indulgence took its toll: Bob was kicked out of the band in 1986 and replaced by Slim Dunlap, who stayed on until the Mats called it quits in 1991. A lifetime of drinking and drugs caught up with Bob in 1995, when he passed away at age 35. Mars eventually quit music and became a painter, Tommy released a few records (solo and with Bash & Pop and Perfect) and now plays in Guns N' Roses, and Westerberg has a solo career. (For a more complete history of the Replacements, see issue #55.)

Hüsker Dü and the Replacements seemed to run on parallel tracks. They shared a New York City debut on April 17, 1983, at a club called Great Gildersleeves. Both were among the first indie-punk bands of their era to sign to a major label. Both wield enormous influence. There may not have been a Pixies if not for the Hüskers; remember that Kim Deal responded to Black Francis' want ad for a bassist into Peter, Paul & Mary and Hüsker Dü. (And what would Nirvana have sounded like had Kurt Cobain not worshiped the Pixies?) Without the Replacements, it's hard to imagine the careers of Uncle Tupelo and Whiskeytown—and, by extension, Wilco and Ryan Adams.

The greatest irony of the Minneapolis music scene is that neither the Hüskers nor the Mats ever made it big in a commercial sense. Soul Asylum—the perennial opening band and often seen as understudies—did. MAGNET's oral history of the Minneapolis scene isn't a comprehensive one: There are probably holes in the story big enough for Prince and all his bodyguards to walk through. And the truth—about Hüsker Dü, the Replacements, the '80s—is all between the lines, anyway.

PLEASED TO MEET ME

WHO'S WHO IN MAGNET'S MINNEAPOLIS STORY

Ed Ackerson: singer/guitarist, the Dig, Polara
Lori Barbero: drummer, Babes In Toyland
Bill Batson: singer, the Hypstrz; soundman, 7th Street Entry
Karin Berg: A&R person, Warner Bros.
Peter Buck: guitarist, R.E.M.
Joe Carducci: co-owner, SST
Angie Carlson: writer, *Minnesota Daily*
Kevin Cole: DJ, First Avenue
Daniel Corrigan: freelance photographer
Peter Davis: editor/publisher, *Your Flesh*
John Doe: singer/guitarist, X
Slim Dunlap: guitarist, the Replacements
Craig Finn: singer/guitarist, the Hold Steady
Steve Fjelstad: engineer, Hüsker Dü, the Replacements, Soul Asylum
Lou Giordano: soundman, Hüsker Dü
Grant Hart: singer/drummer, Hüsker Dü
Tom Hazelmyer: owner, Amphetamine Reptile; singer/guitarist, Halo Of Flies
Michael Hill: A&R person, Sire
Peter Jesperson: manager, the Replacements; co-owner, Twin/Tone
Terry Katzman: soundman, Hüsker Dü; co-owner, Reflex
Martin Keller: writer, *Sweet Potato/City Pages*
Maggie MacPherson: production manager, First Avenue
Scott McCaughey: singer/guitarist, the Young Fresh Fellows
Steve McClellan: manager, First Avenue
Colin Meloy: singer/guitarist, the Decemberists; author, *Let It Be*
Bob Mould: singer/guitarist, Hüsker Dü
John Munson: bassist, Trip Shakespeare, Semisonic
Dan Murphy: guitarist, Soul Asylum
Greg Norton: bassist, Hüsker Dü
Chris Osgood: singer/guitarist, the Suicide Commandos
Dave Pirner: singer/guitarist, Soul Asylum
Jack Rabid: editor/publisher, *The Big Takeover*
Paul Stark: co-owner, Twin/Tone
Tommy Stinson: bassist, the Replacements
Jim Walsh: writer, *City Pages*, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*; musician
Paul Westerberg: singer/guitarist, the Replacements

Peter Jesperson: The scene was very happening. It was bursting at the seams with great bands of all different types, mostly centered around a downtown club called the Longhorn. Before the Hüskers and the Mats, the best bands were the Suicide Commandos, Curt Almstead and the Suburbs.

Angie Carlson: Jay's Longhorn was where it all went down. You'd see all of the people who looked like punks, but they weren't called punks. Everyone called them punkers. It wasn't super-sophisticated. The town was kind of conservative. I had my hair dyed ketchup red, and it was kind of ratty. I'd walk down the street, and people would yell, "Punker!"

Chris Osgood: The Longhorn was like CBGB in that it was a long bar with a low ceiling and the band was up on a riser at one end of the room. It had been a Nino's Steakhouse before it turned into a bar, so it was not a dump; it didn't smell like piss and vomit like CBGB.

Jesperson: The club scene was just the Longhorn from 1977 to 1980. In 1980, a large downtown club called Sam's, which later became First Avenue, opened a small room, which they named the 7th Street Entry.

Osgood: First Avenue was the bigger club. They both were housed in a former bus depot. The main stage was in the back of this big, cavernous room that used to be the waiting room for people heading out onto the buses that would queue up in the back. 7th Street Entry used to be the cloak room.

Jesperson: The Suicide Commandos were the granddaddies of the whole scene. They started around 1976 and were groundbreaking: true punk-rock pioneers. In fact, when we got a promo of the first Ramones album at Oar Folkjokeopus—the record store where I worked—we all thought it was oddly similar to what the Suicide Commandos had been doing. You know, that comic-book punk thing.

Osgood: The Suicide Commandos formed in the summer of '75. The Sex Pistols came along the next year. And we heard the Ramones in the summer of '76; we were just floored, because it sounded so much like us.

Paul Stark: Osgood is probably the most influential local musician of the early '80s. He inspired everything, because his band was the first one to do all original material before punk was punk and alternative was alternative. Lots of high-school kids saw that and want-

HÜSKER DÜ (L-R): GRANT HART, GREG NORTON, BOB MOULD

"I WAS FUELED BY TESTOSTERONE, ALCOHOL, BOREDOM, ANGER AT THE GOVERNMENT AND WANTING TO BE THE BEST BAND IN THE WORLD." —BOB MOULD

ed to be like him. I would have to put Paul Westerberg and Dave Pirner in that camp.

Osgood: Our inspiration was listening to Stooges and MC5 records, the whole Detroit scene. When we saw the Pere Ubu single "Final Solution" in the summer of '76, I remember telling (bassist) Steve Almaas, "Let's do that, too: start putting out records."

John Munson: Many Minneapolitans thought the Suburbs would be the city's lasting impact band, especially after *Credit In Heaven* came out in 1981.

Tommy Stinson: I looked up to the Suburbs, because they were older guys who were rockin' it and had big crowds. It was a funny little scene back then. You'd have parties where Hüsker Dü and the Replacements would all hang out together.

Osgood: I had the great fun of teaching guitar to Bob Mould and Dave Pirner. Bob would come over to my apartment, and I showed him some chord structures. He just did a couple of lessons; he was a very quick study. He was 18 at the time. He'd come over on the bus, get off and lug his flying-V guitar upstairs. Bob was just on the threshold of forming Hüsker Dü.

Martin Keller: A lot of people trace the whole rock scene to Oar Folk. I was living six blocks away at the time, and you'd always run into Jesperson there because he worked the counter most days. Mould was in and out on a regular basis. It was a nice hangout.

Lori Barbero: I have about 8,000 records, and I bought 7,000 of them at Oar Folk.

Grant Hart: Oar Folk had a real snobbish attitude. It was a place to be condescended to.

Maggie MacPherson: A couple of them could be condescending, but I didn't feel that way. At noon every day, they turned the music off and put a TV on the counter; they watched *All My Children*.

Tom Hazelmyer: There certainly was an element of snotty record-clerk shit, but what hipster record store doesn't cop that vibe? Folks like Terry Katzman were infectious in their enthusiasm. I was able to go down there in the summer and watch wrestling on TV with Mould and Katzman behind the counter. I spent hours going through the drawers of obscure punk/under-

ground singles.

Jesperson: Twin/Tone didn't kickstart the scene, but we were there super early and did a lot to help it develop. The label was almost forced into being by the sheer number of good bands in the area.

Stark: There were three of us who started Twin/Tone. I was a recording engineer, Jesperson was the manager of Oar Folk, Charley Hallman was a music reviewer for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. Osgood was really the catalyst. He got us together, and we were all lamenting about how Minneapolis lacked a scene and were trying to figure out what we could do.

Jim Walsh: Jesperson was a muse for many of the young songwriters. He's such a deep listener with such an exacting taste. It wasn't even like Berry Gordy or someone who would make you a star, but in terms of rock 'n' roll, you knew you were on the right track if Peter liked it. He loved a lot of music, from the blues to the Beatles to punk rock.

Jesperson: My apartment was a regular hang for lots of people because I had a large record collection and always had lots of new stuff to listen to.

there was much mingling, but listen to his rock songs and he was obviously listening to something, whether it was Westerberg or somebody else.

Steve McClellan: The chemistry in the main room at First Avenue with Prince, the Time and Alexander O'Neal and in the Entry with Hüsker Dü, the Replacements and Loud Fast Rules was very interesting.

Kevin Cole: The success of Prince almost killed First Avenue. When people saw *Purple Rain*, for the next two years after that, we had people coming down wearing purple trench coats with studs in them.

Keller: We got a lot of media attention. I remember being on *The Today Show* talking about the scene. "The Minneapolis sound" had been tossed around a lot as an all-purpose cliché; it stemmed more from the whole R&B thing starting with "Funkytown" and extended to Prince and the Time.

Ed Ackerson: People talk about Prince and *Purple Rain*, but in the exact same period, Hüsker Dü made music that also had profound impact around the world. Without them, there would never have been a Jesus And Mary Chain, a Yo La Tengo, a My Bloody Valentine, a Dinosaur Jr, a Pixies, a Nirvana.

Cole: When people look back, they think Nirvana, Pixies. The Suicide Commandos did a lot of the work that allowed Hüsker Dü and the Replacements to set the table for the next level. It's hard to picture Nirvana without the Replacements.

Dave Pirner: I know this sounds kind of corny, but it really was a magical time. A band would play the Entry, and the same 20 people would show up. And they'd all be in bands, too. I'd just turned 18, and the drinking age was 18. I got immersed in it and never looked back.

MacPherson: The '80s in Minneapolis is something that couldn't be replicated anywhere. There was a national spotlight on us; we were tastemakers. We all half-assed believed it, but we also half-assed laughed at it. We had as much going on as New York or L.A. I felt there wasn't any city that could touch Minneapolis.

HÜSKER DÜ: DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Hart: Greg and I met at a record store called Melody Lane.

Greg Norton: The owner of Melody Lane also had a tiny store near Macalester College called Cheapo. Grant brought in a PA that he hooked into the stereo and stuck it on the sidewalk and was playing the Ramones. Bob was a dorky freshman from upstate New York with goofy long hair and a leather jacket. He was like, "Oh, hey, I like the Ramones."

"WITH THE KIND OF ROLE MODELS I HAD, I'M FUCKING LUCKY TO BE ALIVE." —TOMMY STINSON

Carlson: There was this scene, but there was also Prince and Terry Lewis and Jimmy Jam getting press. Prince, all five-foot-two of him, would be out at shows with his bodyguards.

Jesperson: I never saw Prince at a Replacements show, but I bet he saw one or two from the shadows.

Keller: Prince knew who everybody was. I don't know if

HÜSKER DÜ

Hart: There wasn't a single thing about starting a band that wasn't fun. We did work hard, but it was fun.

Norton: When the band started, I was working at a store called Northern Lights. The owner was kind enough to allow us to practice in the basement after the store closed. For the first year, we practiced every night.

Bob Mould: We wrote songs constantly: on notebooks, on instruments, anywhere and everywhere. All the time.

Terry Katzman: In late '79, somebody told me I had to see this band playing at the Longhorn called Hüsker Dü, that they did Johnny Thunders covers. I went and watched a set, and I'd never seen anybody play so fast.

Norton: We were really intense when we played. We never got chit-chatty with the audience; we rarely even spoke to the audience. Katzman said we were the most volatile band out there and could implode or explode at any time, but he was referring to our personalities.

Barbero: Bob and Grant got along fine back then. Though there was one night—it was Friday the 13th, a full moon—and Hüsker Dü was playing. Grant and Bob got into a huge fight, and I had to be the mediator. Bob would tell me to tell Grant something, then Grant would say, "Well, you tell him ... " I was like, "Aw, come on, you guys."

Jack Rabid: I had heard Jello Biafra mention them on Rodney Bingenheimer's radio show in L.A. in 1981: "Jello is excited about a Minneapolis band called Who Screwed You." So I sent away for the LP.

Carlson: The shows were chaotic. Bob was super intense, and Grant would come out of a drum roll and just lose it. Greg, the one guy who wasn't gay, was the one with the big mustache. It was the weirdest band.

Craig Finn: I was disappointed they didn't look punk. Bob didn't look like a happening dude; he looked like a wrestling fan, which he was. Greg had the handlebar

mustache, looking kind of crazy. Grant had his shoes off. It was sort of embarrassingly disappointing.

Norton: We thought, "If you don't like the music because of the way we look, then fuck you." There were plenty of other scenes out there that preached, "Be different, be like us, or we'll kill you." We weren't into the hardcore hard-line doctrine.

Jesperson: I was never a big fan of their music. It wasn't my thing. They submitted material to Twin/Tone, but I turned them down. I loved the guys, though; they were good friends. I really admired their work ethic.

Hart: Twin/Tone not signing us seemed to be motivation for Bob. He looked at the immediate interest they had in the Replacements as some kind of personal betrayal. Our song "Amusement" is quite literally addressing that situation.

Norton: We recorded the "Statues" single. Then we said, "Screw it. Let's put it out ourselves." We named our label Reflex because we were like, "If Twin/Tone doesn't want to put our record out, then this is our reflex to that: We will put it out ourselves." In 1980, do-it-yourself was a mantra.

Hart: My mother worked at a credit union. At two years of age, I was one of the charter members. So I took out a loan to put out Hüsker Dü's first single, just for the pressing. The band had saved up the money we paid to record the songs.

Dan Murphy: Hüsker Dü created the scene. Mostly, it was a Bob Mould thing. He organized parties and did all this public-relations stuff.

Peter Davis: Bob was an obvious firebrand for the scene. He had a hand in the first couple issues of *Your Flesh*, but as things progressed for the Hüskers, priorities demanded he focus his attentions accordingly.

Mould: We liked being home as much as being on the road. We found a groove that worked. Either coast was only a couple days' drive away. Why go out for 10 weeks when you can go home after three and get the same amount of work done?

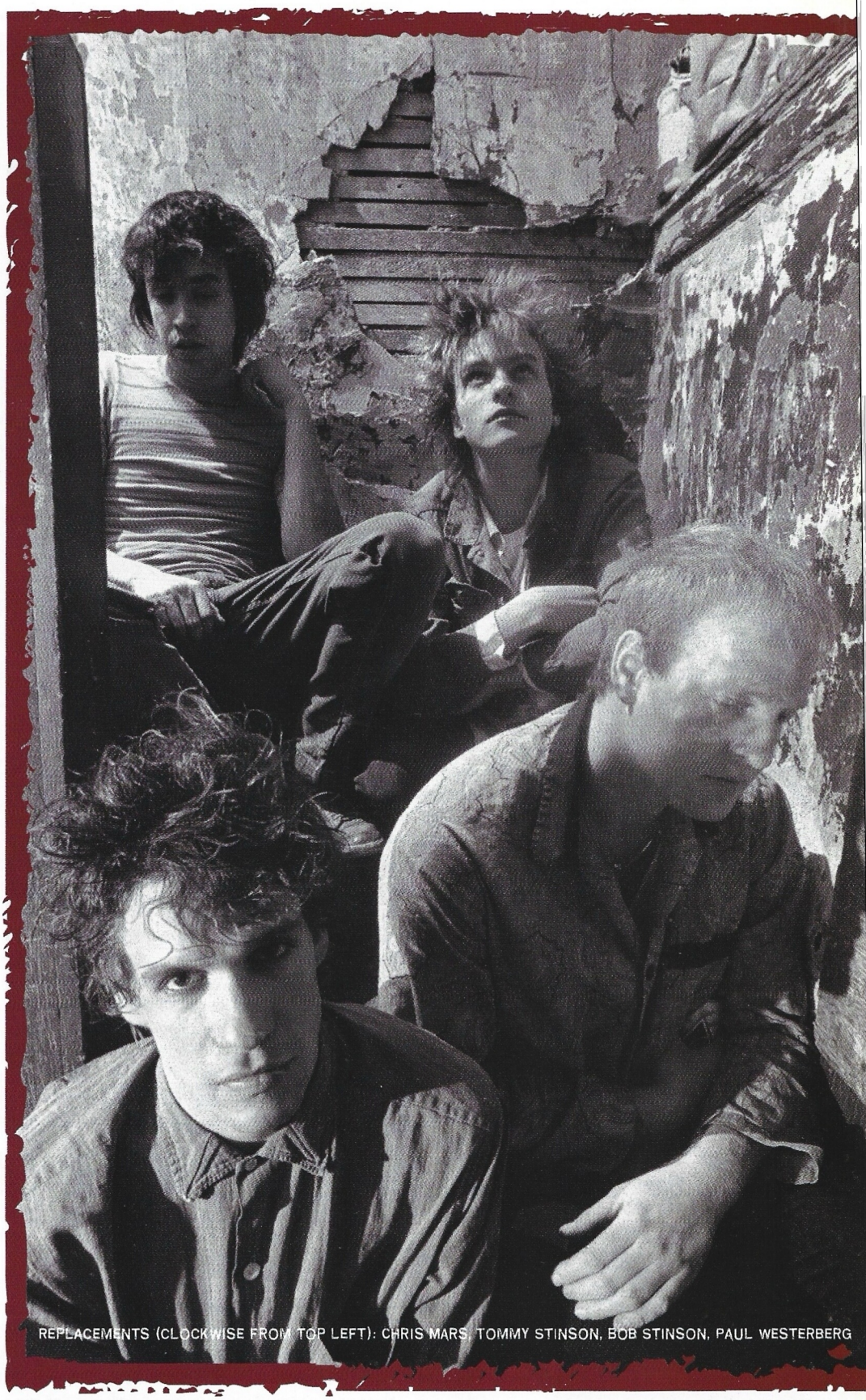
Katzman: I went on the road with them once. That was quite an experience, when they were running on really cheap, bad amphetamines exclusively.

Norton: Grant was living at home, and I don't think he had a job. I was waiting tables. We were on a $5-a-day per diem. We were hungry. A lot of times, taking speed was a cheaper and easier way to go. It all stopped in different degrees. Bob quit drinking and taking speed. Grant has his own demons to deal with; he went in a different direction.

Mould: I've used a lot of drugs over my time, but it's been 20 years since I've touched heavy drugs, and I haven't drank in almost as long. I would say my personality at that time was fueled by testosterone, alcohol, boredom, anger at the government and wanting to be the best band in the world.

Norton: The first time we went out East, we weren't sure what kind of response we were gonna get. We were surprised to discover we had a nice little fanbase there because of college radio. The Boston shows were great, the Providence show was great, the Philly shows were great, the D.C. shows were great. So then we get to New York, and at the show (with the Replacements) are all these hardcore punkers who are into Agnostic Front. I guess we weren't hardcore enough for them.

Rabid: That gig was part of a series of "Hardcore Sundays" at Great Gildersleeves. The audience response was so tepid, it really pissed on the mood. Mould looked really angry, as if he was mad at someone, like he was going to beat someone up. It was odd, this tremendous energy coming off the stage to such little reaction.



REPLACEMENTS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): CHRIS MARS, TOMMY STINSON, BOB STINSON, PAUL WESTERBERG

Norton: There are two things I remember about that show: this opening band with these 14-year-old kids called The Young And The Useless and that the Replacements didn't get paid.

Hazelmyer: I think the best show I saw the Hüskers do was around *Everything Falls Apart*. They had come back from their first in-depth tour. All of us were really excit-

ed to see them, and it was in the big room at First Avenue. With the chops they picked up on the road, they fucking sheared everybody's head off. The other guys in my hardcore band looked at each other with their jaws literally open.

Lou Giordano: It was like being in a car with the gas pedal stuck all the way down, and all you could do was steer.

Joe Carducci: I first saw Hüsker Dü at the Mabuhay in San Francisco in '81. Greg later called to see if SST would release *Land Speed Record*, which was recorded at their return-home gig from that tour, I think. SST couldn't, but Mike Watt told me he would release it without even hearing it, so it came out on New Alliance.

Hart: We had an infatuation with SST. We had met them when Dez Cadena was still singing with Black Flag. We played a Black Flag after-party gig in Chicago. It was the means by which we impressed them into starting a career with us, which ended up with them being about half a million dollars in the hole to us.

Norton: A lot of times, we would let SST hang on to our royalties so they could put them back into artist development. Things didn't go south until after we left the label. But for the last 17 years or so, SST hasn't been generating any statements, so we don't even know how many records we've sold.

Mould: SST hasn't provided an accounting in years, but how much do I think we're owed? At least five figures, probably six figures.

Bill Batson: I was happy for the Hüskers when they signed to SST. It allowed them to sell hundreds of thousands of records, not that they saw their fair share of the proceeds. They got ripped off, big time.

Hart: We stopped taking any money from SST. We did it to keep our own fucking records in print.

Giordano: The band could've sold probably five times as many records if they were available.

Hart: We were on the third date of a two-month tour to promote *Zen Arcade* and were doing an in-store at a store that didn't have any of our records.

Mould: I think that period was the high water mark for us: *Zen Arcade*, *New Day Rising* and *Flip Your Wig*. Since the '60s, show me another group that put out a double album in July, another album in January and another album in September—of that quality—and was on the road constantly.

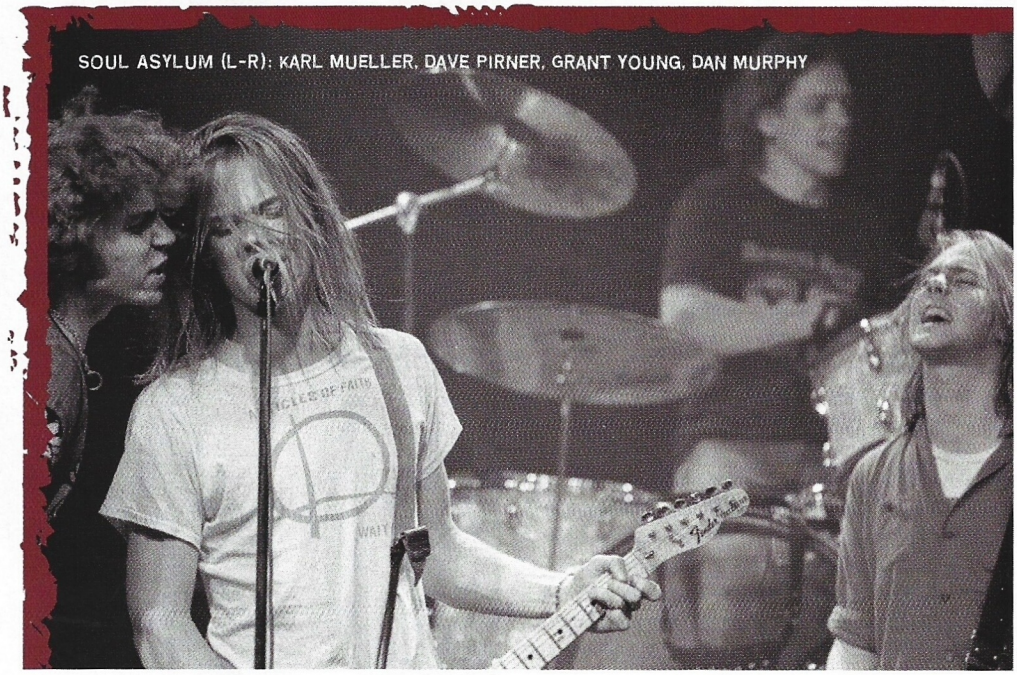
Norton: 1984 was the first time we started to get interest from major labels. We really didn't see any benefit to signing with one.

Mould: A&R people were hovering from *Zen Arcade* on. All labels. They would come to the shows and hang out and try to buddy up.

Carducci: Bands don't last forever, but you could already see they were going to end. They gave SST *Flip Your Wig* when Warners wanted it because they were writing so many songs and could impress upon Warners that they didn't need them—and get a better deal.

Hart: That's not true. Karin Berg was in town when we were finishing the mixes of *Flip Your Wig*. She said, "I want Warner Bros. to put out this record." It would've been a hell of a lot better a major-label debut than the downer *Candy Apple Grey*, which would've been a great third album on a major label. It was a major miscalculation by Bob, who thought he fucking knew everything and would lie about the business going on in order to carry on what he had planned.

Norton: It could be argued that if *Flip Your Wig* was on Warner Bros., it would've fared a lot better.



SOUL ASYLUM (L-R): KARL MUELLER, DAVE PIRNER, GRANT YOUNG, DAN MURPHY

Karin Berg: I wanted *Flip Your Wig* so bad. It might be their best record. For that to come out on Warner Bros., it really would've done well. They didn't have a contract with SST, but the band "owed" them because they were such nice guys.

Mould: The consensus among the three of us was that it should stay with SST. But if you ask me that now, years later, when Greg Ginn hasn't paid a dime for at least seven years and can't even come up with a royalty statement? Yeah, it would've been great if it had gone to Warners. They always paid on time.

Berg: It wasn't a huge deal. It was a good deal, but it wasn't a big deal.

Mould: We all bought houses. Modest houses.

Berg: I was derided by *Billboard* for signing Hüsker Dü. They said something to the effect that I was crazy. I got a lot of flak. That just shows you how revolutionary Hüsker Dü was and how revolutionary it was for a major to sign a band like that.

Steve Fjelstad: Having two songwriters like Bob and Grant in the same band is kind of like Genesis with Peter Gabriel and Phil Collins, two people of that talent.

Berg: The big problem in Hüsker Dü was there were two chief writers, and the band needed both of them. The way the two balanced each other was just incredible.

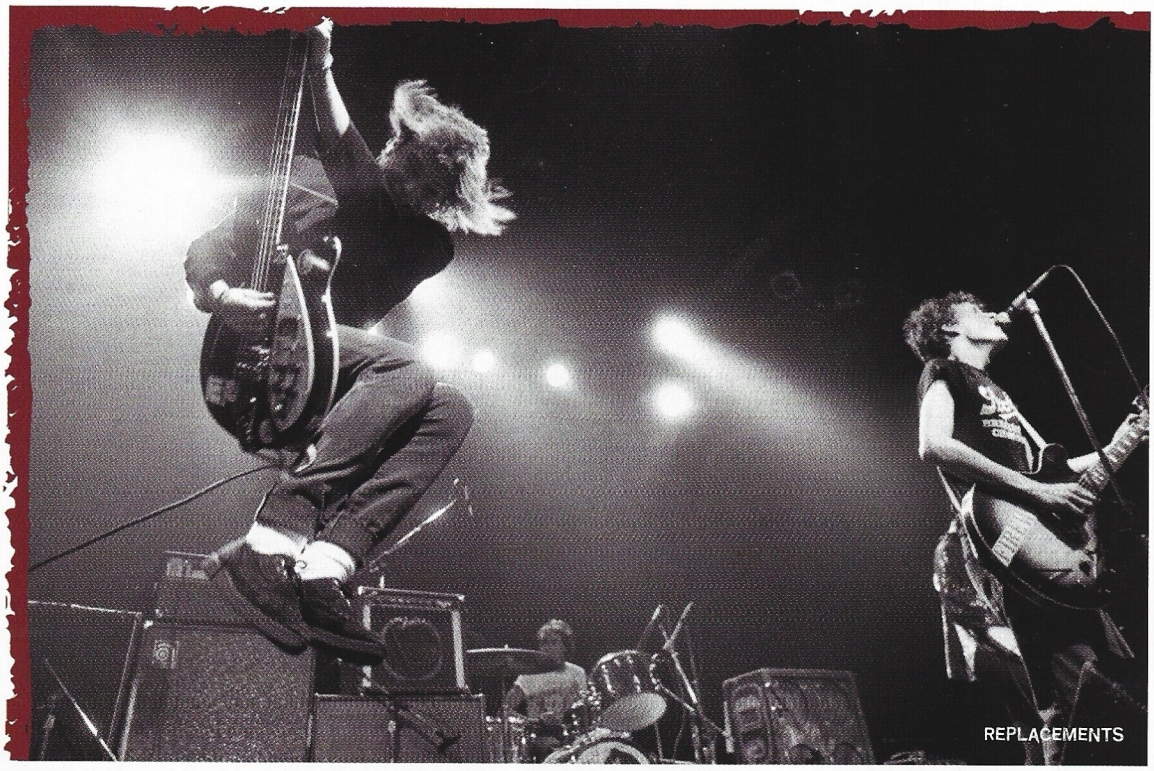
Norton: When Bob said we were going to do the individual songwriter credits, I thought it was just Bob being pissed off at Grant, not realizing I was the only one who thought the songs the three of us worked on were collaborations. I mean, it said, "All songs by Hüsker Dü." Bob went back and changed it, so he got all the money.

Hart: Bob can stink up a room without saying a word. The guy has an intimidation factor that's exponentially greater than anyone I've ever met in my life. He can loathe you through a wall. Bob had all of this contempt. It was like, "Why are you in a band with me if you fucking hate me so much?"

Berg: Grant was willing to cede power. Bob had won the power struggle, but Grant ceded too easily. Whenever we had a meeting, Grant never said anything. Bob would take over and just go for it. It was all passive-aggressive stuff. Grant is just as responsible.

Norton: The competition between Bob and Grant was just getting started in 1984. That's about the time I intentionally backed out of participating in writing. I was

"WE WANTED TO SEE HÜSKER DÜ FAIL. WE WANTED THEM TO BE THE SECOND BEST BAND IN THE CITY." –PAUL WESTERBERG


REPLACEMENTS

like, "Fuck you guys. If you want to write all the fucking tunes, then write all the fucking tunes."

Hart: Me and Bob were writing the songs, and Greg was golfing. He detached himself so much at that point. He had the most fun. Greg's the one who didn't have to put up with an anti-Greg. Greg always had a private life that didn't come to him through or because of the band.

Mould: Greg drifted out of the band a lot sooner than everybody else. There wasn't a whole lot of contribution except for the live stuff and the lion's share of the driving.

Hart: I think Greg knows he was used. There were things at the end of the band, and he didn't know what the fuck to do. Most of what he assumed was fabricated by Bob in the first place.

Norton: I'm happy with how I handled things. I don't think it would've been good if I'd taken sides with Grant or Bob.

Daniel Corrigan: Grant was always wound up, but that's his nature. Toward the end, there was obvious tension, but they kept it pretty much amongst themselves.

Peter Buck: I played with Hüsker Dü several times and hung out with them and never noticed anything unusual. All bands have tension.

Berg: I had no idea the band was at such odds with one another. There was a meeting at Warner Bros. about something where Bob and Grant disagreed, and I agreed with Grant. Bob got his way, and I went, "Uh-oh." The hostility in Bob's voice was something that I had never heard before.

Hart: Bob was conducting Hüsker Dü affairs as if he was the leader and made himself impossible to approach about things.

Giordano: Bob was taking over the internal management of the band, so he took on the responsibilities of organizing everything. If I needed to talk to anybody, he was the guy I'd get an answer from. He was the boss.

Norton: There was never a time when Bob became the leader of the band. He probably would disagree with that. Bob is somewhat of a revisionist. But it's not like Bob called the shots or set up the tours.

Giordano: He used to call club owners and negotiate rates with them and bust their balls and give them a hard time. It seemed like it was something really easy for him to do. I don't think there's any case to be made for Bob overstepping his bounds.

Hart: Bob is such a massive control freak. Controlling the truth and controlling the story and mopping up afterwards and spreading some sort of thing beforehand and peppering the field. Around the time of *Candy Apple Grey*, he actually wanted to rehearse interviews. I'm like, "Are we not going to know what the answers are? Why do we need to do this?" I think it might've been like, "Hey, what if they pull the big gay zinger?"

Fjelstad: I wouldn't say Bob was a control freak. Bob was very focused. He knew exactly what he wanted to do.

Norton: We were self-managed, though once we got to Warners, they told us we had to have a manager.

Berg: All bands should have a manager. It doesn't have to be a pro, but someone who can keep track of your schedule. It can be your best friend. They got David Savoy. He was Bob's choice. He was a sweet guy. He committed suicide.

Hart: David? Greg and I hardly knew him when he was drafted by Bob to come in and work for us. All of a sudden, we have this guy who's doing a fine job nine to five and taking care of things. But then he disappears for two weeks, and eight months later, he jumps off a bridge. In all his human aspects, David was a fine, wonderful fucking person. But he was far from the only person who could've done that job. He had a loyalty to Bob that was the reason first and foremost for Bob wanting to use him.

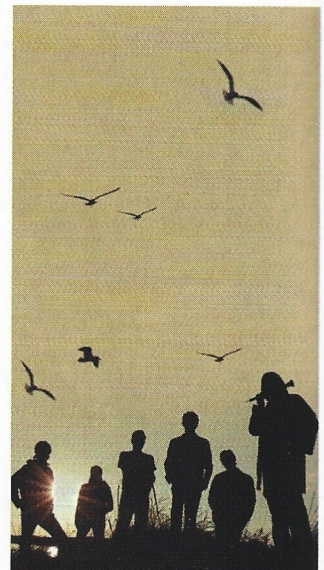
Giordano: David was basically operating under instructions from Bob.

Mould: When David committed suicide, that was the beginning of the end. Everyone sort of retreated into their own corners and dealt with that in their own particular ways.

Hart: That makes a great fucking story. Bob, I'm sorry your friend died and everything, but you're still a prick.

Fjelstad: By *Warehouse: Songs And Stories*, Bob worked on his songs and Grant worked on his songs. The two of them weren't really in the studio at the same time.

Hart: I was living with this fella named Ivan, and it was at the point where I wasn't going to be able to keep both him and the band. It turns out I kept neither. In Bob's eyes, Ivan was totally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KEY TO THE CITY

A MINNEAPOLIS GLOSSARY

ALL SHOOK DOWN: the Replacements' last album (1990)

JELLO BIAFRA: Dead Kennedys frontman

CANDY APPLE GREY: Hüsker Dü's first album for Warner Bros. (1986)

CREEPERS: thick-soled, often two-toned, rockabilly-style shoes; an '80s fashion staple

BOB DYLAN: the best writer from Minnesota

EVERYTHING FALLS APART: Hüsker Dü album (1983); reissued with "Statues" and other bonus tracks as *Everything Falls Apart And More* (1993)

FIRST AVENUE: nightclub made famous by Prince's *Purple Rain*

FLIP YOUR WIG: Hüsker Dü's last album for SST (1985)

GREG GINN: Black Flag guitarist and co-owner of SST

JAY'S LONGHORN: punk/rock venue

LAND SPEED RECORD: Hüsker Dü's first album (1982)

LET IT BE: the Replacements' last album for Twin/Tone (1984)

LOUD FAST RULES: Soul Asylum's first moniker

MACALESTER COLLEGE: liberal-arts college attended by Bob Mould

MATS: shorthand for Replacements

NEW ALLIANCE: Minutemen-run label that released *Land Speed Record*; it was later bought by SST

NEW DAY RISING: Hüsker Dü album (1985)

OAR FOLK: record store (a.k.a. Oar Folkjokeopus)

PLEASED TO MEET ME: Replacements album (1987)

PUNKER: slang for a punk; a punk rocker

REFLEX: Hüsker Dü-run label (1980-1985)

7TH STREET ENTRY: smaller venue attached to First Avenue

SIRE: Warner Bros. subsidiary; home to the Replacements (1985-1991)

SST: seminal hardcore/punk label; home to Hüsker Dü (1983-1985)

"STATUES": Hüsker Dü's seven-inch debut (1981)

SEYMOUR STEIN: president and co-founder of Sire

STINK: Replacements mini album (1982)

TIM: the Replacements' first album for Sire (1985)

TWIN/TONE: the Replacements' label (1981-1984)

WAREHOUSE: SONGS AND STORIES: Hüsker Dü's last album (1987)

WARNER BROS.: home to Hüsker Dü (1985-1987)

YOUNG AND THE USELESS: early-'80s NYC hardcore band featuring Beastie Boy Adam Horovitz

YOUR FLESH: Minneapolis-based fanzine

ZEN ARCADE: Hüsker Dü album (1984)

and completely King Demon. Ivan was involved in drugs as well.

Norton: Bob and I were trying to get Grant into some kind of drug program, which never happened.

Mould: I've never talked about Grant's situation, and I never will. I think that's personal.

Fjelstad: At that point, Grant was dabbling in other things, wandering someplace else.

Hart: The more successful the band is, the more compelled you are to not leave it. You become even more cemented in it. I don't know how unconsciously it occurs, but I was in the position of: Die or quit the band.

Berg: They had an intervention for Grant. I think it was before the last tour.

Giordano: There were some nights that Grant wasn't able to give the best show he could give. It was disappointing to everybody, because when you saw him on a good night, when he was pouring his heart out to the people and was on, it was like magic. On the nights he wasn't on, I wanted to hide behind the sound board.

Hart: Bob said, "It's up to you, Grant. Should we go on and play, or do you just want to head home?" And I'm like, "Hell, man, let's go play." "Well, Grant, we already canceled it." "OK, so you wanted to give me the fucking opportunity to think you gave a fuck."

Giordano: We didn't cancel those two dates for nothing. We made a decision to cancel them because we knew we couldn't put a dependable product onstage.

Berg: Bob called me and said they broke up.

Norton: I was pissed off at Grant. I was pissed off at Bob, too. It got to the point with Bob that I realized I had nothing in common with him. It was obvious he didn't give a shit about me anymore, so whatever. It was fine.

Berg: It was an ego clash, remarkably similar to the Television breakup. I think Bob and Grant were a little surprised I was in shock they broke up. It was really sad.

Norton: Grant would say he quit the band in December when we were on the last tour. Then Bob got himself a lawyer and had himself removed from the contract. So according to Grant, he broke the band up. According to Bob, he quit the band. Bob would probably say he fired me. Leading up to when Bob withdrew from the contract, I had had conversations with him about me and him keeping the band together with a new drummer. At the same time, Bob told Grant, "Let's you and me keep the band going and kick Greg out and get a new bass player." Basically, it comes down to this: Who do you believe? I don't doubt Bob had plans for a solo career and this was a great time for him to get it started.

Mould: Who quit first doesn't matter. It just ends. When I knew it was over, I had my lawyer file my leaving-member exit letter, which had to be done legally to notify Warner Bros. that the work is over. It nullified the contract and left them with two options: Replace me or sign me to a solo deal. They approached me about the latter, but I turned it down. I said, "I don't think it's in my best interest. It will look like I quit the band to get a solo deal. I'll get another deal on my own, thank you."

Hart: As time goes by, I become more and more satisfied that I am the member of Hüsker Dü I am. I don't have people knocking on my door to release the next Grant Hart record, but at least I haven't put out a number of lousy ones. I think people realize Bob has lost it or wasn't the main driving force in the first place.

Mould: You're gonna get a lot of differing opinions

SUICIDE COMMANDOS (L-R): DAVE AHL, STEVE ALMAAS, CHRIS OSGOOD

about what happened, and that's the great thing about history: People are left with multiple versions. With the band, I think the truth probably lies in the middle. At the end of the day, the records are what speak the truth.

THE REPLACEMENTS: MADE TO BE BROKEN

Paul Westerberg: One day, a friend asked me if I wanted to go hear a band play. I walked in very casual. I was immediately struck by Tommy; his amp was bigger than him.

Stinson: When we started, I was still under my brother Bob's musical influences, which were prog-rock stuff, from Yes to Johnny Winter.

Westerberg: Bob Stinson had the worst record collection I ever saw. The next time I came over, I brought three albums with me: Dave Edmunds' *Tracks On Wax*, *Singles Going Steady* by the Buzzcocks and the first one by the New York Dolls. They figured it out after a while. I remember walking up the stairs to take a piss and Chris whispering to the other guys, "This is friggin' punk rock," like I was trying to slip them angel dust.

Stinson: The thing I remember most about that period was that we were not punk rock. We were some weird hybrid of all four of our weird musical experiences.

Jesperson: It was spring of 1980, and I ran Oar Folk. This guy I didn't know named Paul Westerberg came in one day and gave me a tape. When I put in the Replacements' cassette, I was floored in about 30 seconds. The first song was "Raised In The City," and I remember hearing the line, "I got a honey with a nice tight rear/She gets rubber in all four gears," and I was just completely knocked out. My initial thought was it sounded like a raggedy update on Chuck Berry. Paul told me later that, coincidentally, he was in the store when I put his tape on. I guess the moment he heard it start, he ran out the door.

Stark: Westerberg was a force that would be either really good or really bad. This was a band that would need a lot of nursing in the early stages. Peter was willing to do it, and he managed them for the first few years. Tommy was kind of unknown; he was in eighth grade at the time. Mars was obviously a talented artist with his drawings, and he was more than adequate as a drummer. Bob was a real character. Westerberg was a talented songwriter who still had to learn his trade.

Jesperson: Paul's songwriting talent was very evident from the beginning. Even though he developed in many ways over the years, he was a naturally brilliant writer from day one.

Westerberg: I'm the second best writer from Minnesota. I've come to terms with that. There's the extent of my arrogance.

Carlson: Paul was always really funny. All of those guys were funny in this kind of Northern way. People from the North are pretty blunt and sarcastic.

Walsh: I think growing up Catholic plays a part in Paul punching through the ceiling. Paul would deny it, but you can't come up in that environment and not be enthralled by the mystery and the ritual and the words and the music. You embrace it as well as rail against the clenched buttcheeks of it.

Jesperson: Tommy was 12 when I met him, and I don't recall any trepidation having someone so young in the band. He was a great bass player, had tons of spunk and was really funny. He fit right in. I became his legal guardian. Nobody bought him liquor in the early days, as he didn't drink. Later on, I guess we all bought it for him.

Stark: Jesperson got guardianship of Tommy from his mother. When they were on the road, Tommy was 14 or 15, and he had to have a legal guardian to go into bars.

Carlson: Tommy was just a kid. I remember kids giving him a hard time in school because he looked like a punker. Or maybe they were jealous.

Stinson: Or maybe they just thought I was repulsive. I dropped out in the middle of 10th grade. I went to New York the first time then. I had sex the first time when I was 13. That's a little young, even by today's standards. It caused a lot of weird growing-up shit.

MacPherson: When I was married to (Suburbs drummer) Hugo Klaers, Tommy used to come over and borrow

"I WAS IN THE POSITION OF: DIE OR QUIT THE BAND." —GRANT HART

"King Of All Festivals"
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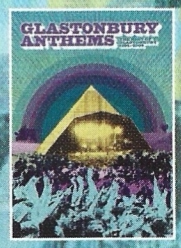

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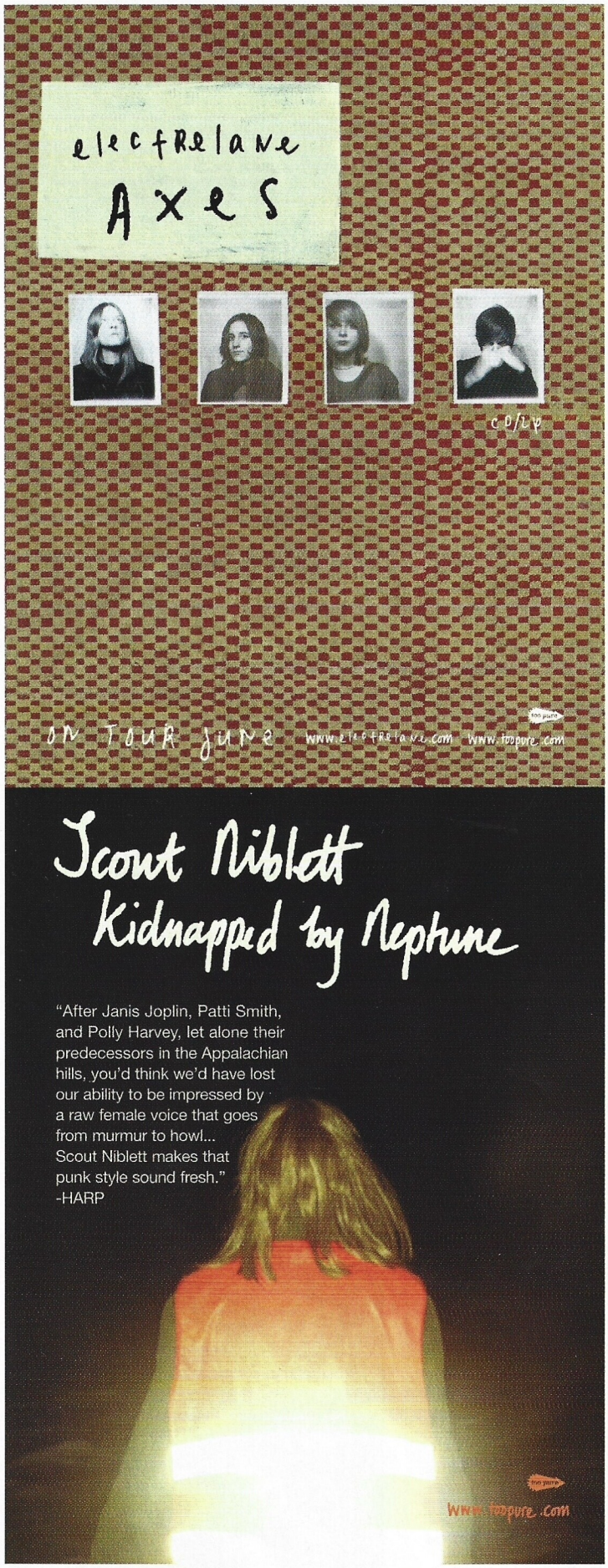
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clothes. He found his own style early, and he just ran with it. He was always wearing creepers, with his hair gelled up.

Barbero: The Plasmatics played at the Longhorn, and the Replacements were the support act. Wendy O. Williams was chasing Tommy around all night long with electrical tape on her nipples. Tommy was 14. Finally, he's like, "Lori, that lady won't leave me alone!" He was scared. We were backstage, and I told Wendy, "You gotta leave him alone. You're freaking him out." She didn't care for that too much, and she picked up a chair and winged it at me. It smashed the glass pane on the door.

Walsh: If I could think of one great rock 'n' roll image—people might say Pete Townshend doing the windmill, Paul Simonon smashing the bass, Elvis doing his thing—I think of Paul Westerberg turning around to look at Chris Mars. They shared a smile between them, and to this day, it chokes me up to think about it. The love between those two. It was like they were the two sane ones. Tommy was younger, and Bob was another boy, another planet. Chris and Paul had gone to Catholic school.

Keller: Chris is very quiet and not the person most likely to be voted the Replacements' drummer; maybe he's the brick that was holding it all to the ground for a while. He's a really inside guy. There's a lot going on there we've never seen.

Stinson: Bob had a beautiful heart. People around him loved and cared a lot about him. He was a loving man. Talk to anyone who knew him and they'll talk about how sweet he was.

MacPherson: Bob was one of the sweetest people on the earth. He was a savant in a lot of ways. Everyone was so used to Bob being around and being happy-go-lucky, and then these things would pop out of his mouth that would stun you: little gems of philosophy that would stop you dead in your tracks.

Carlson: After one show, I told Bob what I thought about it. I talked to him for a while. And he goes, "You were there?" That's what it was like talking to Bob.

Fjelstad: Bob was, uh, out there.

Corrigan: One of Bob's favorite tricks was to walk into the dressing room, hawk up a loogie, spit it up on the ceiling and wait for it to drop on an unsuspecting victim.

Buck: As far as I could tell, Bob went his entire career with the Replacements without knowing the names of any of the songs. He didn't know what key they were playing in when the song started and didn't know what key they were in when the song ended, but he sure could play some great stuff in the middle.

Slim Dunlap: Bob could be so bad and so great in the blink of an eye. When you saw him on an off night—and most of them were less than awe-inspiring—it was always incredibly interesting. When you saw him when he was really on, he was capable of things that were just not normal.

Jesperson: The early Replacements gigs were revelatory rock 'n' roll shows. When I first saw them, the band they most emulated was Johnny Thunders & The Heartbreakers. The first time I saw them, they did three Thunders songs. The Replacements had a punky attitude and played real fast and real loud, but they weren't your dictionary definition of a punk-rock band.

Barbero: Don Holzschuh is a local artist, and he had his studio in a warehouse downtown. The Replacements played there; that's when the opening bit from (*Stink*'s) "Kids Don't Follow" was recorded: "OK, party's over, Minneapolis police."

Carlson: The Minneapolis cops were real bastards. They called it setting up and operating a club without a license. You'd go to these parties and a band would play and you'd put money into a jar. It would go to the band and help pay for a keg.

Walsh: We played a high-school dance with the Replacements at this building called the Sons Of Norway. I'm pretty sure that's where Paul got the line "We are the sons of no one" for "Bastards Of Young." The Mats wouldn't help carry our equipment. The little shits just got in the elevator and left. People have bitched about them and said they needed a manager, but that's why you loved them. Because they weren't trying to placate anyone, and they weren't trying to do anything but have fun. You can talk to Westerberg right now and he'll tell you why: He didn't want to get a job, period. Which is a very healthy impetus for a rock band.

Jesperson: It was just the five of us in the beginning. They wrote and played the music, I tried to do whatever else needed to be done. It wasn't difficult to manage them in the early days, but it became difficult, especially when they signed to Sire in 1985.

Davis: There was a definite security blanket of people surrounding them. The Twin/Tone and Oar Folk cognoscenti really doted on that band to the nth degree.

Hart: Jesperson did more for the Replacements than any individual in that band.

Stark: People who only saw them onstage stumbling drunk thought they were lazy and didn't deserve anything. At the same time, that band rehearsed more than most bands I've ever seen. Westerberg took himself extremely seriously, to the extent

where he was kind of anti-everything. He intellectualized everything so much that it worked out against him.

Westerberg: Some of that Replacements stuff was jive, that sort of I-don't-know-how-to-play stuff. For us, it was all or nothing. We were either going to be the greatest band on earth or the worst. Settling for just being a good band was not an option. People like to see human error when it's honest. When people see you swing and miss, they start to root for you.

Walsh: I'm sure a lot of bands wouldn't admit it, but everyone wanted to be in the Replacements: the fans, their friends, other bands. They were everything great about rock 'n' roll. They were having the time of their lives. It expressed so much about what it felt like to be 19 or 46.

Finn: The Replacements did five nights at the Entry when *Tim* was released. The first two nights were all-ages; I went to both. They were doing one of their shambling shows, doing covers. They did Hank Williams and "Kumbaya." It was a little over my head because I was in ninth grade, and we'd gotten a hold of some alcohol. But you were never as drunk as they were. My sense of the Replacements at the time was not that they were an underground band or a punk band. As a ninth grader, I understood them to be an unsuccessful rock band. They didn't look like they knew how to dress as a rock band.

Colin Meloy: My uncle told me about them, that they lived in Minneapolis. Minnesota felt like a not-too-distant sibling of Montana. There was the same feeling of being in the middle of nowhere, sort of what I was experiencing going into my teenage years living in Montana. They really belong to people in those middle states; they're kind of public domain.

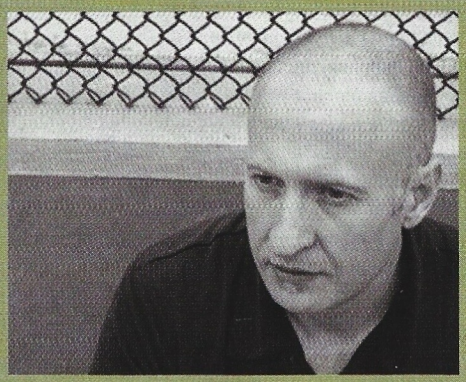
Stinson: Our fans were more like us than they even fucking knew. They didn't really fit anywhere or anything. They probably didn't aspire to a whole lot, but also didn't aspire to doing nothing, either.

Cole: All of the Replacements' shows were newsworthy.

WHAT ABOUT BOB?

MOULD RETURNS WITH "BODY OF SONG"

Back in 1998, feeling ignored and more than a little bored with loud guitar rock, Bob Mould took a semi-permanent vacation from the grind after touring out the aptly titled *The Last Dog And Pony Show*. Mould moved from New York to Washington, D.C., began dabbling in electronic music (culminating in 2002's syncretic *Modulate*) and started DJing a gay-friendly



dance night at the 9:30 Club. Now comes the return of Bob rock, with *Body Of Song* (Yep Roc) splitting the difference between Sugar's blast-furnace emo and *Modulate*'s laptop pop. Just don't call it Moby Dü. He hates that.

Let's go back to *Dog And Pony Show*. What's going through Bob's mind? Bob is tired of ...

Bob is tired of a couple of things: Bob is tired of playing the same old guitar music he's been playing for 20 years. I was starting to hear other music that was interesting, whether it was hip hop or dance music. I wasn't particularly happy with Rykodisc at the time; it was a label that was in definite decline and in "sell" mode. Overall, I just wanted a break; you know, being in my late 30s, living in New York and wanting to enjoy the fruits of my labor. Just spend a few years taking care of myself and having a good time with life and figuring out a new way to present myself.

You look a lot healthier than you did in, say, 1985.

I'm fucking buff. [*Laughs*] I'll put you through a fucking wall.

What's your secret?

I'm a gym rat. I work out six days a week, usually nine times a week. A lot of lifting. I hate cardio. I am a clean-living machine right now.

You don't drink anymore?

No. The last time I had a drink was at Greg Norton's first wedding in 1986.

What prompted you to make guitar-based rock 'n' roll again?

From 1999 to the beginning of 2004, I just spent a lot of time on the computer. A lot of time with loops, a lot of time with samples and listening to house music. And trying to merge that with the rock stuff. It wasn't like I was trying to double back with the guitar; I just started writing those kind of songs again.

Reading through your blog and talking about your DJ nights, you sound really happy and well-adjusted. But when you strap on the guitar, the old Bob Mould—sour, glaring, accusatory—seems to come out again.

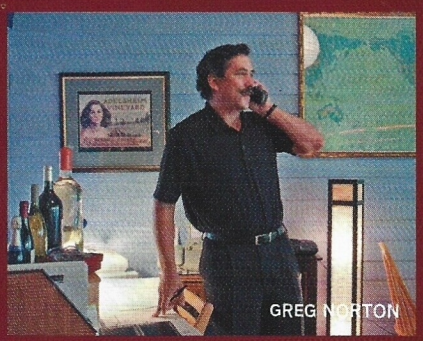
I think as Bob Mould records go, this is a pretty sunny record. But if all I ever wrote was, "Yeah, had a great workout today and finally nailed that perfectly rare steak on the grill," it would not make for the best lyrics. So I draw on relationships: personal, temporal, political.

There was that kind of buzz that would spread around town, just people talking about what happened: what were they wearing, what were they doing, what songs did they do, what were they able to finish? There was a lot of interaction with the audience, where with Hüsker Dü, it was much more stoic. The Hüskers were a machine and would rage through their music.

Hart: People always ask about this so-called rivalry between Hüsker Dü and the Replacements. We were from the same town and sharing the same stages. In the press, any time we got a column inch, they got a column inch. Any time we would get a photo, they would get a photo. People were paranoid about paying too much attention to one band without giving attention to the other.

FLIP YOUR GIG

LEADING THE POST-ROCK LIFESTYLE


GREG NORTON

When Hüsker Dü officially ended in January 1988, bassist **Greg Norton** was 29, decidedly unwealthy and unemployed. He ended up in the restaurant business, first as a server, then as a chef. "I had some natural ability and a good palate, so I dove into that," says Norton. "My only training was just on the job." By 1995, Norton had attained the position of head chef at Staghead in Red Wing, Minn., where he met his second wife, Sarah, in the kitchen. In 2003, the couple opened their own place, The Nortons', in Bay City, Wisc., about 60 miles from Minneapolis. The Nortons' serves contemporary American cuisine and boasts an award-winning wine list. Says Norton, "It's not a novelty act: 'Ex-punk rocker becomes chef.' We actually know what we're doing."

After leaving the Replacements in 1990, drummer **Chris Mars** continued making music: From '92 to '96, the "quiet" member of the Mats released four solo records. What might've begun with creating his album covers has blossomed into a full-blown visual-art career for Mars, who now paints full-time. "Some call my art surrealist, because I like to work with lots of detail," says Mars, who still lives in Minneapolis. "But I think of the work as closer to expressionist, except perhaps that I'm not investigating the self as much as the world outside of me." (See for yourself: Mars' artwork is featured on page 85.) According to Mars, the imagery in his paintings is also informed by his older brother Bill's battle with schizophrenia. His artwork is on permanent display at the Minneapolis Institute of Art and has been purchased by celebrities such as Prince, Tom Petty and Michael Stipe, not that Mars cares very much. "My mom and my wife own some of my work," he says. "That makes me most proud." Mars declined to speak about the Replacements, saying, "I'm just not living in that space anymore. It's been so long, I feel more and more removed as time goes by, and I'm on another path."

Chris Osgood—pioneering punker, guitar teacher and benevolent godfather of the Minneapolis scene—has continued to be a paternal figure around town since the Suicide Commandos called it quits in 1978. "We were the only band I knew that broke up with assets—stuff to sell, a PA," says Osgood. "We cashed out for a few hundred bucks each." As director of artist services at Springboard for the Arts, Osgood counsels artists, musicians, writers and actors on how to manage their assets and market their work.

Mould: I don't remember a specific rivalry. Grant would say things that would stir the shit, and it was funny. When you stir the shit, it can draw attention to both people.

Norton: There was always a little healthy rivalry between Hüsker Dü and the Replacements. We wanted them to be the second best band in town.

Westerberg: It was a friendly competition. We wanted to see them fail. We wanted them to be the second best band in the city.

Fjelstad: There were never any rivalries, Everyone was friends. We all got along great.

Buck: I don't think the two bands were in different camps as much as the fans, friends and followers were. I got the feeling that if you were going over to Mould's house, you wouldn't go over to Westerberg's house, though the two of them didn't feel that way.

Norton: There are some obvious stylistic differences, but we were a pop band in the same sense that the Replacements were. The Replacements were like the Rolling Stones, and we were like the Beatles.

Finn: I got the feeling the Replacements were bigger locally and the Hüskers were bigger nationally. Hüsker Dü toured all the time.

Keller: That's because all the members of Hüsker Dü could drive. None of the Replacements could drive other than Chris Mars and maybe Tommy after time. Paul still doesn't drive.

Jesperson: The Hüskers were around first, so the Mats envied them in some ways, and I think the Soul Asylum guys looked up to them both. Then, of course, Soul Asylum got bigger than either, so that was a whole other kettle of fish.

Osgood: The Replacements were fast friends with R.E.M. and a lot of other people. Maybe R.E.M.'s one-brick-at-a-time way of building a fanbase might've worked for the Replacements if they hadn't been so self-destructive.

Walsh: Around the time of *Let It Be*, Westerberg and Peter Buck walked around the Entry one night in whiteface. They were drunk as hell and walking through the bar. It was very glam and very bizarre and not earnest. That's the thing that bugs me: Minneapolis gets a reputation for being earnest or Midwest. It's genuinely fucked up and sophisticated, too.

MacPherson: We were upstairs in the main room where the bathrooms are. Westerberg and Buck were in the girls' bathroom putting makeup on each other and, at one point, cutting someone's hair. It might've been Jesperson.

Buck: I seem to remember it more being lipstick. The day probably started about noon at the CC Club. Not that any of us wore a huge amount of makeup, but occasionally you get the whole Johnny Thunders thing going. I do remember that night, though, because we got some real looks walking through the neighborhood.

MacPherson: They completely made themselves up, and we all jumped in cars and drove over to someone's house for a party. On the way over, we stopped at a White Castle, and there was a long line. People in this line just wanted to kill Peter Buck.

Scott McCaughey: Minneapolis was the first place where they had a White Castle. The Young Fresh Fellows had to drive a long way from Seattle to get Slyders—or "little bastards," as (Smithereens drummer) Dennis Diken likes to call them.

John Doe: I remember Paul, Tommy and I going around Minneapolis one night, looking for a party at 24th and Harriet. It was colder than hell, and Paul ran up to one house and looked in the window. We thought we were gonna get arrested. I remember them shaving their eyebrows. I have no idea why.

Jesperson: 1985 may have been the year the Minneapolis scene came to national attention, but I don't think it was necessarily a high point. It was rewarding in that a lot of the hard work we had done was finally being recognized, but a self-consciousness started coming into play.

Michael Hill: Seymour Stein, who was already legendary because of what he had done during the new-wave era, had the ability to sign whatever he wanted to Sire. He fell in love with the Mats the first time he saw them, in December '83.

Osgood: We were grooming them and hoping they would go to a major label. That was our philosophy with all our bands. We saw ourselves as a minor league, trying to develop talent.

Hill: Karin Berg signed Hüsker Dü around the same time that the Mats were signing to Sire. It was a kind of one-two punch for Warner Bros.

Walsh: I called Westerberg when they signed to say congratulations. He said, "Yeah, I just hope they don't make us wear monkey suits."

Westerberg: We were afraid of what they were going to do to us, with good reason. We knew it was the end of something, but we had to move on because what had come before had exhausted itself. I believe it was my songs and Tommy's looks that Seymour Stein thought he could take to the bank.

(continued on page 123)

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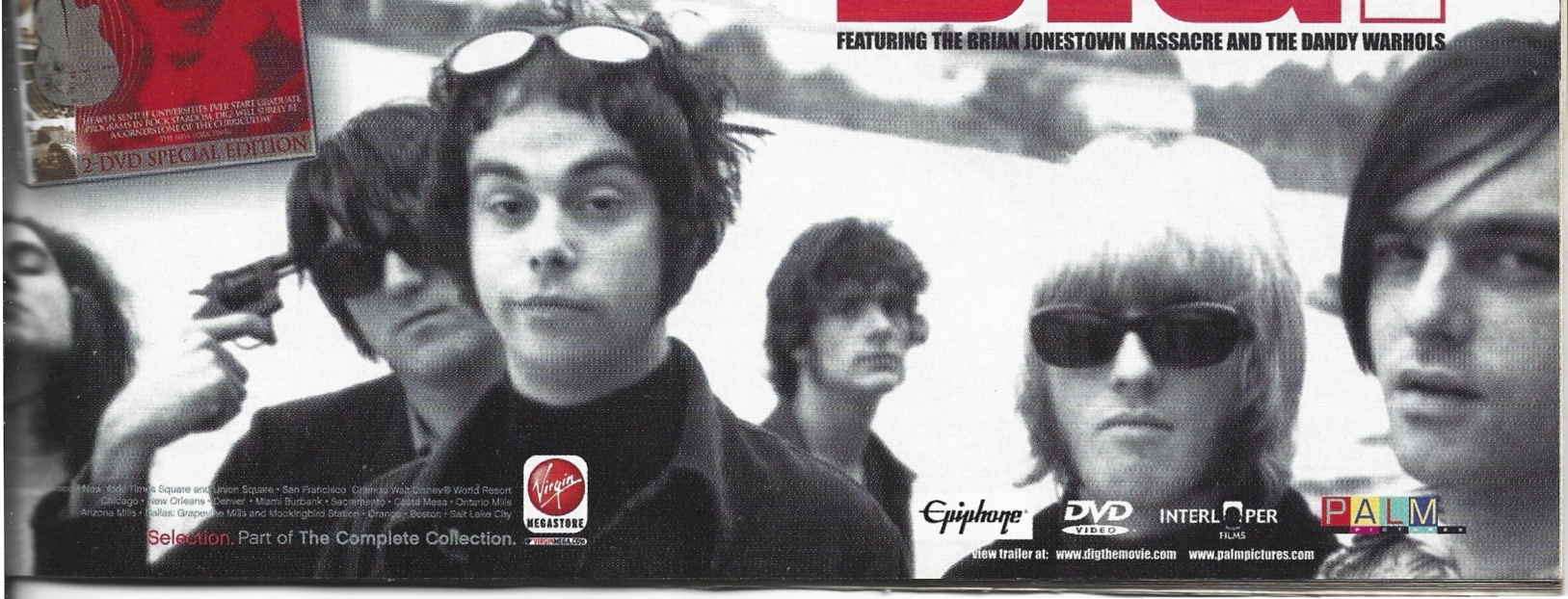

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Relative Stranger

Singing grandmothers, family feuds, vaudeville medleys and rock 'n' roll: For brother/sister duo the Fiery Furnaces, it's all completely natural.

By Tom Lanham / Photos By Dennis Kleiman

In retrospect, the Archaeopteryx should've been a big, bright, blazing clue. Because seriously, in this high-tech, no-nonsense world, who splashes an elaborate pen-and-ink drawing of a prehistoric bird/lizard—the missing link between the reptile and avian kingdoms, scientists say—across the cover of a debut album?

Decidedly eccentric New York brother/sister duo the Fiery Furnaces did just that, placing the Archaeopteryx alongside drawings of a goat and a German shepherd on 2003's *Gallowsbird's Bark*. The warning signs were there. They just went unheeded.

Gallowsbird's Bark (its title is intentionally tongue-twisting) seemed like a clear-cut case at first. The bluesy acoustic guitars of key composer Matt Friedberger coupled with the soulful, Deep Ellum belt of younger sister Eleanor produce a funky, retro-hip photo negative of the White Stripes, right? But more warning signs appeared with *Blueberry Boat*, last year's surreal sophomore set. It opens with a tempo-shifting, 11-minute seafaring saga titled "Quay Cur," then minces merrily into what can only be described as vaudeville-vintage show tunes. Heavy on cheesy keyboards and Eleanor's campy cabaret vocals, *Blueberry Boat* is the polar opposite of the traditional second album: It didn't play on the Furnaces' long suits—it obliterated every last trace of them.

Naturally, there isn't much continuity in the group's most recent release, *EP*, which is actually a full-length album. Supposedly a rarities collection, the 10-track *EP* opens with the nervous drumbeat and kooky synths of "Single Again," a cheerily chirped tale of spousal abuse with the memorable couplet, "He beat me, he banged me/He swore he would hang me." Then there's the smiling piano ditty "Here Comes The Summer," the *faux*-madrigal "Sing For Me" (trilled by Eleanor in perfect Elizabethan diction) and the truly unusual "Duffer St. George" (which melds zany Farfisa verses with a heavy, Black Sabbath-like chorus). It's the Archaeopteryx, all over again.

Add to all this the carnival-sideshow wonder of the Fiery Furnaces in concert. Backed by the thundering rhythm section of bassist/keyboardist Toshi Yano and drummer Andy Knowles, Matt Friedberger—his hair obscuring his face most of the time—hunches hyena-like over his electric guitar or Fender Rhodes, slashing out angry chords, while Eleanor barks a torrent of words with machine-gun precision at center stage.

At San Francisco's Great American Music Hall, the Fiery Furnaces' opening number—which sounds like a *Blueberry Boat/Gallowsbird's Bark* suite and seems to go on forever—isn't even a song at all, but a rabid hybrid of four separate cuts. It contains the lyrics from "Wolf Notes" sung to an "Asthma Attack" riff, coupled with a verse-hopping mash-up of "Crystal Clear" and "Leaky Tunnel." Or, as Matt later calls it, "a real Frankenstein mix of material."

The band's fans—many of the girls have copied Eleanor's *In Style*-featured fashions of cowgirl dress and Frye boots; their male counterparts, strangely enough, all seem to resemble actor Jeremy Piven—eat up all this Edward Lear-ish jabberwocky. But there's no real time to applaud. The Friedbergers careen headlong into the next track, then the next, foregoing between-song banter and audience-warming chit-chat.

It isn't all that surprising, then, when Eleanor fails to show up for the scheduled interview the next day. At the poolside patio of the Phoenix Hotel (the preferred Bay Area lodging of touring musicians), Matt appears and announces his sister won't be attending. When phoned at her room only a few feet away, Eleanor's line is busy. (The band's publicist later reports the siblings were in the midst of an end-of-tour spat.) Granted, Matt writes most of the Fiery Furnaces' songs. But shouldn't his admittedly shy sibling be in attendance, if only to tell her side of the story?

"Have you seen our press?" says Matt with a shrug. "I do all the talking anyway. So maybe Eleanor just felt like she wouldn't have too much to say with me in the picture."

It's an odd beginning, talking to only half of a team of two. But gradually, thanks to Matt's likable, oddball personality, this starts to make fearful symmetrical sense. He's wearing all black, from his jeans to his tennis shoes to his button-down shirt, all of it cloaked beneath a black trench coat. The first time you meet Matt, you can't help doing a double-take. With his deep-set eyes, heavy brow and jutting jawline, he's the spitting image of b-movie star Bruce Campbell. Yes, the 32-year-old sighs, he's heard this before.

> "When we were kids, people always liked Eleanor. Eleanor was perfect. But me? I was sulky."

"I used to look a lot more like him when I was younger and more handsome," says Matt. "When I was younger, I looked like Bruce Campbell in *Evil Dead*, before he got a little too handsome in *Evil Dead II*. People always said to me, 'Hey, you look like Bruce Campbell in *Evil Dead*!' Which is cool, because I think Bruce Campbell is great."

Grackles, your garden-variety blackbirds, stop what they're doing (in this case, balancing precariously for baths on a depth rope that divides the surface of the pool) and flutter over to Matt for a better look. Soon, they've practically surrounded him.

"Birds!" he suddenly notes, just as interested in them. He points to a wading pool by the patio's exit gate. "They say that there's a great blue heron that comes down and tries to eat those goldfish in the pond over there," he says. "That's why they've got plastic rigged up in front of it, so it can't swoop down and get them anymore."

Matt talks as fast as his sister sings. He's got ideas—lots of them—and they crash together with the propulsive force of whitewater rapids. The Fiery Furnaces, he reveals, have two new records simultaneously hitting stores in August. The first is a straightforward (relatively speaking, of course) pop album called *Bitter Tea*.

"Like what you drink," adds Matt helpfully. "It's mostly three-minute songs, a very up-tempo and shiny sort of record. The songs are all short except for one in the middle, a long song called 'Rain,' which is a little adventure story about somebody being in western China. But it's all love songs, real romance things; we hadn't done that before. You know, there's so much bright material on it, it's almost Devo-ish."

The second set, which will most likely be packaged alongside the first, is much more Archaeopteryx. It's dubbed *A Late Train To My Lost Love*, and it features—in half-sung, half-recited call-and-responses—an album-length duet/dialogue between Eleanor and the siblings' 84-year-old grandmother, Olga Sarantos (shortened from her Greek surname, Sarantopolous). *A Late Train* is divided into three movements: a three-minute opener, a 25-minute segment and a 28-minute finale. The tableaus revolve around the Chicago neighborhood where Sarantos has trilled and played rafter-rattling organ for her church's choir since 1939. For Matt, the choice of employing an elderly relative felt logical by Fiery Furnaces standards.

"She's kin, and she always wants to play," he says. "So it didn't seem strange at all to recruit her, because I'd always played with her in a very casual way. I played upright bass as a kid, so for Christmas carols, I'd play the bass and she'd play the piano and sing. I've always talked about music with her, so it was easy to talk to her about this. Plus, I thought that her and Eleanor's voices would go really well together, and Eleanor was always keen on the idea, too."

The experience turned out to be quite entertaining for all concerned. When the trio entered the studio in November to begin recording, Sarantos started flirting with the engineer.

"She asked him if he was married and said he looked 25," Matt chuckles. "And he's *not* 25. But she enjoyed going into the studio, enjoyed being in front of the big microphone."

The lyrical scenarios on *A Late Train* are mostly either entirely fictional or loosely based on anecdotes from Sarantos. "Except that there's one family story," says Matt. "There's one song that has a fake supernatural element to it, but it's not obscure; it's not meant to be prog-rock esoteric. And there are sections where they're just repeating (vocal sounds) back at each other. Eleanor will play my grandmother when she's young, and my grandmother will play, uh, my grandmother when she's old. Like now."

Sarantos, a classically trained singer, immediately grasped her unusual assignment. But she demanded a few rewrites and, on a couple occasions, was forced to slap Matt on the wrist.

"The change I was most pleased with was a line I had written that went, 'There was one man I couldn't get along with.'" says Matt. "She told me, 'I can't say that! I can't end a sentence with a preposition!' So instead, she sings, 'There's one man with whom I couldn't get along.' I thought that was great, what she

(l-r): Matt Friedberger, Eleanor Friedberger

stopped to correct me on."

It's uncertain as to whether Sarantos will join the Friedberger siblings onstage for some *Train* performances in the future. "Too bad it's not 10 years ago, 'cause she could've been our keyboard player," says Matt. "But she doesn't need the hassle. Maybe in Chicago she'll make a special appearance. But she's still the most star-like musician in our family."

Inspired by classroom notes Eleanor once scribbled in junior high, Matt, the workaholic of the Fiery Furnaces, is already gung-ho on the band's fifth album. He'd like to begin production this summer, but Eleanor, who's been seen canoodling with Franz Ferdinand frontfellow Alex Kapranos of late, nixed the idea for now.

"Eleanor thinks we need a break," says Matt. "But I want to force as much into this band as possible."

In 10 years, he reckons he's penned more than

GRAHAM PARKER

'Songs of No Consequence'

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'The Dirty Old One Man Band'

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"If you're in a band, you should write five songs a day."

2,000 songs. Growing up, Matt used to challenge himself with a quota of five tunes per day. "It's fun to write songs, if you make it fun," he says. "If you're in a band, you *should* write five songs a day. And yes, it's hard to do that. But it's great to at least pretend to have some discipline about it."

Discipline was always the one character trait Matt lacked as a child. His father, a historian, never touched a musical instrument, though his mother, a pianist and guitarist, encouraged her kids to experiment with music and signed up Matt for piano lessons. "I was no good at it," he sighs. Then he took up bass viol simply because it was fun to play. "As a kid, you can just aimlessly play it, and you're not even listening to it," he says. "You're just plucking away. It was fun snapping those strings." After that, Matt tried the electric bass, then a cheap Casio keyboard and finally a rinky-dink Yamaha guitar.

"But I was a shit of a kid, a really stupid kid," he says. "People always liked Eleanor. Eleanor was perfect. But me? I was sulky. And I was as smart as I ever was when I was about 12; I never really got any smarter. I was a philosophy student at the University of Illinois, but I failed right out of college. I liked buying books better than I liked reading them, and I definitely didn't like reading them for a class."

Music gradually took over, until Matt was so well-versed that he knew exactly what sounds he wanted for his brother/sister combo. So, for example, his scholarly, rambling description of what he'd imagined for *Blueberry Boat* is extremely specific.

"I thought we could have a whole album of these long, pre-prog-rock, later-but-not-*too*-late-'60s, extended-narrative studio songs," he says. "Like the second side of *Abbey Road*, which, of course, is late '60s, and the *Smile* outtakes, which you can now buy pretty easy, just in the shop, even though you can still get bootlegs of it, all put together, and it sounds remarkable. And Eleanor and I are both Dylan fans, first and foremost, so we wanted to do ballads, like Kit Lambert/Who story-songs. And when you have that, the vaudeville-y style is very important. Like, even if you don't think about it, the Who and the Small Faces were pretty obviously music-hall kind of things, with kind of a campy feel, even though they were very macho bands. And that campy theater stuff is very important for British rock, from the Beatles to John Lydon. But that," he says, catching his breath, "is neither here nor there, I suppose."

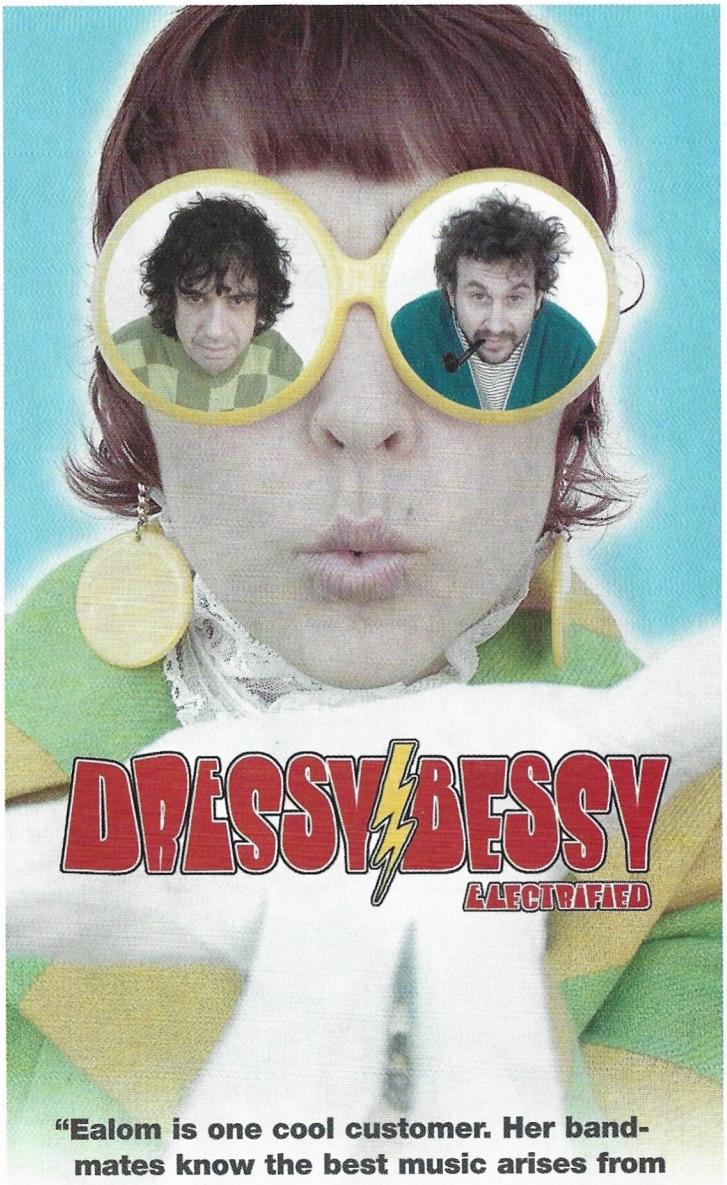
Perhaps this is why several Fiery Furnaces blogs have sprung up, spewing in-depth analyses of what Eleanor is really singing about and what her brother really intended. Is it rooted in any substance, like psychedelics? Matt guffaws. The band is stimulant-free, he asserts.

"Although we'd probably benefit from me being stoned all the time," he grins. "And I don't have ADD, either. I want to be on record as saying that, because I've seen that written before. Sometimes I am manic, especially in these situations where we're on tour and there's nothing to do. Because I was lazy as a kid, now I'm a convert to 'If you don't work hard in life—at whatever task you're doing—then you're bad.' So I get very frustrated being locked away somewhere or just being in a situation where nothing seems to be happening."

As if on cue, something does happen. Onto the poolside patio bounds 20-year-old Dan Layus, singer/songwriter for hot Epic Records outfit Augustana, whose upcoming debut was produced by Brendan O'Brien (Pearl Jam, Korn). The wide-eyed Layus is full of unbridled enthusiasm, rattling off yarns about his current tour opening for Welsh stadium vets the Stereophonics and how things are really revving up for his buzzworthy outfit. When he learns the Fiery Furnaces are doing *two* nights at the same San Francisco venue his band just played at, he earnestly inquires, "So, who are you guys opening for?"

Matt's eyes widen in surprise, and his jaw begins to clench. He looks like the wind has momentarily been knocked out of him. "Ummm ... we're headlining," he murmurs.

"Right on!" beams Layus, genuinely enthused. "That is totally rad!" **M**



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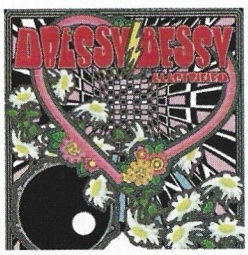

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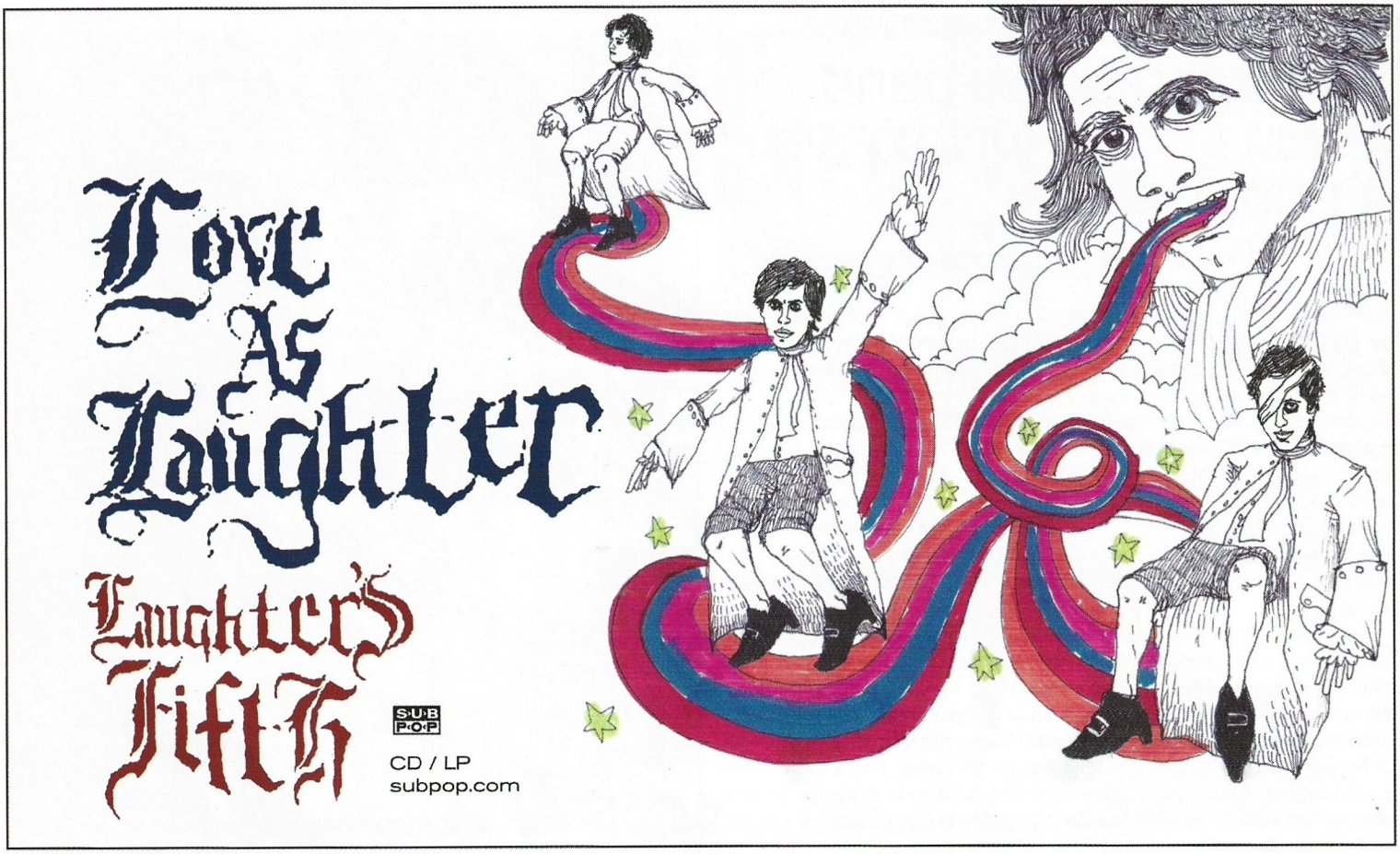
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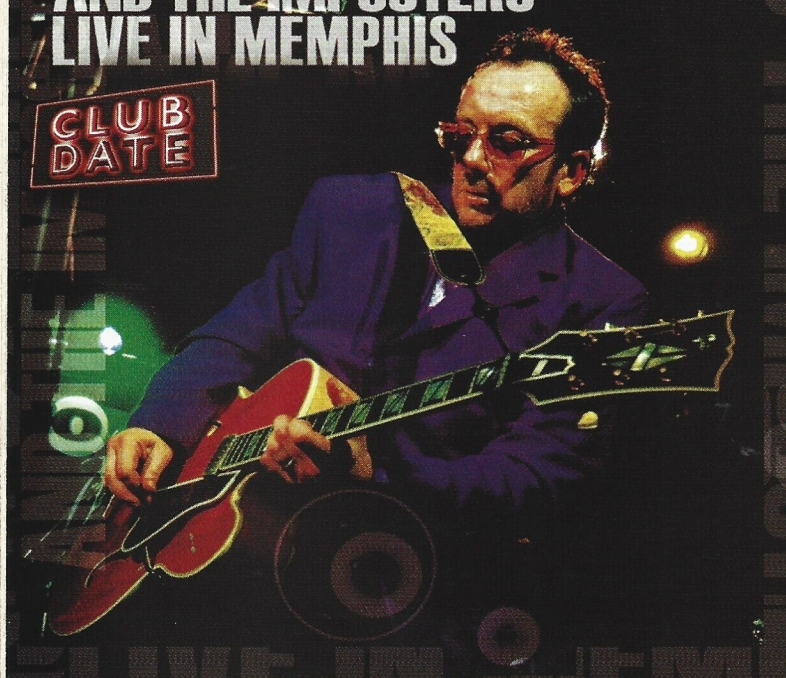
ELVIS COSTELLO
AND THE IMPOSTERS
LIVE IN MEMPHIS



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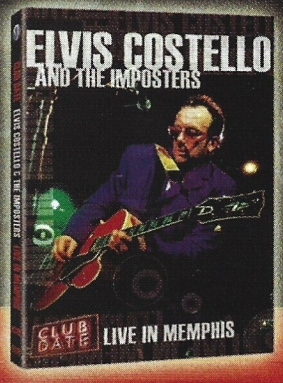

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ALICE TEXAS
SAD DAYS

Alice, Texas, is a town east of Corpus Christi in the southern tip of the state. Alice Texas, however, is the musical vehicle of Alice Schneider, a dark-haired New York beauty who, on her second album, is clearly in a Southern state of mind. "I miss my honey baby/Down in North Caroline," she croons on the epic "Where I'd Become," a Gun Club-styled slice of slide-guitar blues with a noir storyline about two kids on the lam from the law and, perhaps, from each other. On that tune and others—the opiated, country/jazz "Run To You," the sweet, Calexico-esque "Lonely One," the twangy, droney "Tramp's Haire" (a compelling yarn of Texas passion and murder)—Schneider traces a road map through the same semi-mythic American heartland that's inspired scores of authors and songwriters. She holds up her end of the literary bargain; the lovers and losers who populate her songs seem tragically, terrifyingly real. Abetted by longtime guitarist Peter Mavrogeorgis and drummer David Berger (who joined not long after 2000 debut *Gold*), Schneider is equal parts Patti Smith, Polly Harvey, Hope Sandoval and Loretta Lynn and as artistically combustible as that collision of personalities might suggest. **[Fargo, www.fargorecords.com]**

—Fred Mills

ARCHITECTURE IN HELSINKI
IN CASE WE DIE

For a band with eight members (five men and three women, all multi-instrumentalists), Architecture In Helsinki constructs songs with lots of silences in them. On the Melbourne band's quirky, exuberant second album, melodies pause, twist, turn and shift among two or three instruments. While all eight members probably appear on every track, they never seem to play at the same time. "Do The Whirlwind" builds on a retro synth groove with woodblock percussion, adds some near-chanted vocals (first female, then male), handclaps and a trumpet solo, takes a breath, then shifts the focus to a choir of sighing voices before ending with a swinging horn fanfare. The bouncy, chipper beat never stops, but over the course of its four-and-a-half minutes, the arrangement doesn't stay in one place for long. Elsewhere, the members of AIH yell their vocals *a la* Arcade Fire, pile concepts together *a la* His Name Is Alive and mix the conceptual with the humorous *a la* the B-52's. Sometimes, as on the overly packed title track and the hyper "The Cemetery," *In Case We Die* seems forced and willfully eclectic. But the stuttering "Frenchy, I'm Faking," the wordy, Afro-Caribbean "Need To Shout" and the horn-driven "What's In Store?" impress. They make *In Case We Die* full of ideas as well as joyful energy. **[Bar/None, www.bar-none.com]**

—Steve Klinge

BEARSUIT
CAT SPECTACULAR!

Perfection in rock is a suspect device. Part of the pure joy of early indie rock is its grubby, what-the-fuck spirit, a repudiation of technical virtues that's been rendered antique as the phrase "under the radar" goes from college slang to a category at Coconuts. So, then, a warm welcome to Britain's Bearsuit, a band so spastic and shambling it makes Swell Maps sound like the Scorpions. The songs clatter, clamber and clang. "Cookie Oh Jesus" recalls the hyperactive candy pop of Talulah Gosh, its guy/girl vocal combo bouncing between bleating trumpets and palpitating percussion; "Prove Katie Wrongg" is crowded with cooing synths that warp in and out of key without warning as the band warbles over top of them. Yet despite its giddy haphazardness, there's a clear design to Bearsuit's kitchen-sink ethic. "On Your Special Day" glides from a mournful flute intro to a ticklish crescendo of pizzicato strings, managing the same rickety complexity as a Rube Goldberg contraption. And therein lies the glorious paradox: Precision is easy, chaos is hard work. **[Microindie, www.microindie.com]**

—J. Edward Keyes

SCOTT H. BIRAM
THE DIRTY OLD ONE MAN BAND

Scott H. Biram's fourth full-length provides an answer to the question, "What's the sound of a one-man band crapping?" Maybe that's too harsh. Surely the guy's got only the best of intentions, and there's absolutely no need to call into question his genuine appreciation of raw country blues. Hell, the recorded medium is probably not the best showcase for the manic energy of a one-man band. Ultimately, Biram's problem isn't constraint but rather that his primitive stompers traffic in sub-*Hee Haw* superficiality ("Downtown Chicken"). In 2003, Biram survived a horrific accident; his pickup truck tangled with an 18-wheeler. Besides breaking multiple bones and obtaining a lifetime pass to maintain his trucker-hat aesthetic, the mishap seems to have had quite an effect on his single-minded song titles. Witness "Hit The Road," "Wreck My Car" and "Truck Driver," the last of which has been

covered in concert by Hank Williams III, Biram's tourmate and another real-deal insurgent-country artist who overreaches for a fuck-all-y'all outlaw persona. The cornpone caricatures of *The Dirty Old One Man Band* aren't helped by the fact Biram sabotages his best, most rocking songs with his penchant for cheap novelty. Gritty howler "Whiskey" starts off fine, but, regrettably, his guitar launches into the Champs' "Tequila." You half-expect Pee-wee Herman to come out dancing in shit-kickers and overalls. (Don't even get me started on the live medley that dips into "Black Betty.") Biram's enthusiasm is real, and he's probably sincere, too, but he's hamstrung by his fascination with rig wranglers, CB glossolalia and a dull perpetuation of Southern stereotypes. *Old One Man Band* deserves the same cultural legitimacy afforded to C.W. McCall's "Convoy." Thing is, Biram would probably take that as a compliment. **[Bloodshot, www.bloodshotrecords.com]**

—David Dunlap Jr.

TIM BURGESS
I BELIEVE

Lately, the market for books based on rock 'n' roll subject matter has become so thinly sliced, even some of my more negligible ideas have drifted toward the publishable. The latest gaseous emission to escape the thought bubble: "Famous frontmen, solo failures." This tome might include chapters on Mick Jagger (whose albums are so relentlessly mediocre you want to beg him to make nice with Keith), the Stone Roses' Ian Brown (whose career has resulted in uneven listening since Madchester chilled out for good) or new additions such as Charlatans UK frontman Tim Burgess (a journeyman whose second-division band has achieved a cult following at home despite never really catching on in America). *I Believe* was issued nearly two years ago in the U.K. but is just now finding its domestic release. It's a slab of lukewarm Oasis rock that fails to achieve liftoff musically or develop a point of view lyrically. Burgess spends the entirety of his debut pouring forth a rain of truisms, aphorisms and DIY psychology like a guy trying to corner the market in existentialist Hallmark cards: "If I were only a boy again, I'd do it all different than I did back then"; "We all need love"; "We all need a little something to hang on to." Failing to get mine into print, maybe it's Burgess whose book will be published instead: *Tuesdays With Morrissey: My Pep Talks With A Manic Manc*. **[Koch, www.kochentertainment.com]**

—Corey duBrowa

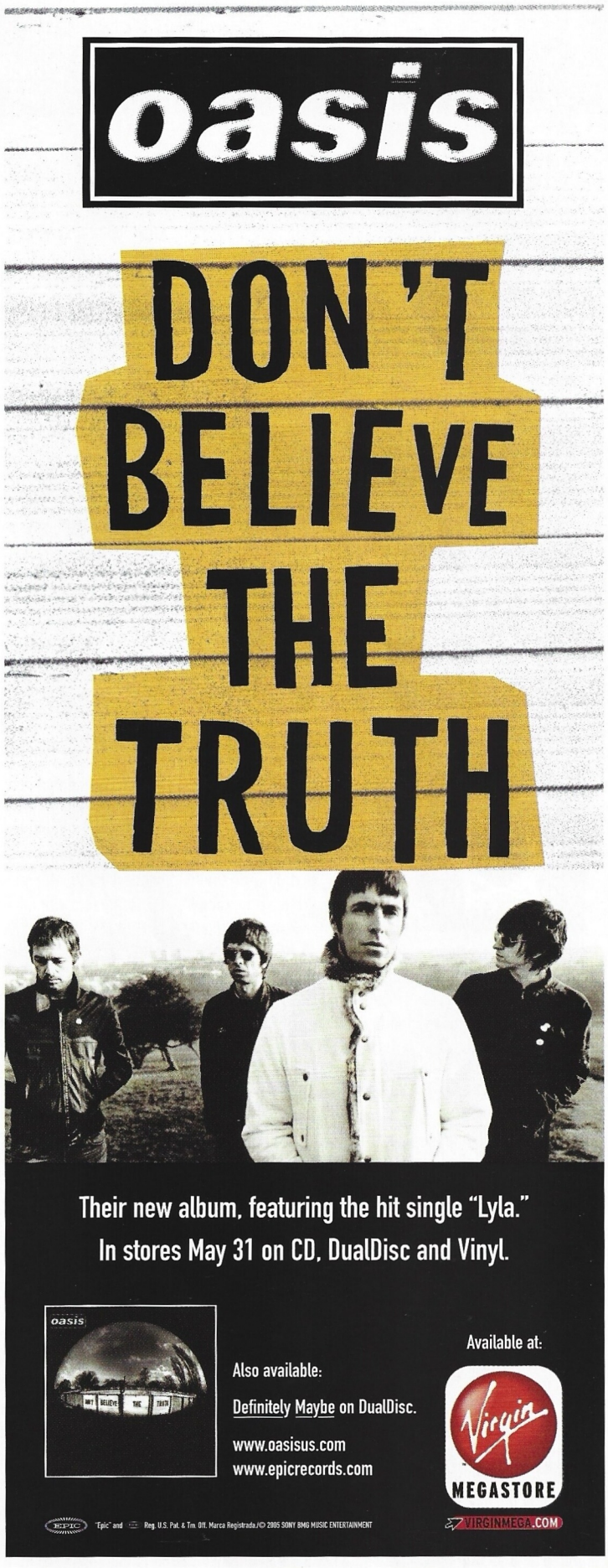
SALLY CREWE AND THE SUDDEN MOVES
SHORTLY AFTER TAKE-OFF

Like Elastica's Justine Frischmann and the Pretenders' Chrissie Hynde, Sally Crewe is tough and cool, direct and sassy, punky and poppy. She sings with a swagger, even when she's full of self-doubt. The songs on the successor to 2003 debut *Drive It Like You Stole It* rarely break the three-minute mark, and all 13 barely total 33 minutes, but Crewe

BOREDOMS
SEADRUM/HOUSE OF SUN

Seadrum/House Of Sun is likely as far into trance and techno as these Japanese art rockers are ever going to get—for which, listenable though it is, you're somehow grateful. The two title tracks, each more than 20 minutes long, provide a steady tonic-chord background for voices and keyboards ("Seadrum") and sitar and guitar ("House Of Sun") to explore multiple harmonic variations in the style of Terry Riley's 1964 minimalist masterwork *In C*. Rhythms switch and reverse throughout both cuts, but the droney nature of the first and the stoned sound of the second—frontman Eye Yamataka has been mucking about in Japan's rave and DJ culture for a number of years now—make the whole thing pass much more quickly than you'd expect, since the Boredoms are a band that usually commands attention right out of the box. Of course, it's well-played and well-mixed, and the two songs are sufficiently different from one another to provide a sort of aural balance. But by its very generic nature, *Seadrum/House Of Sun* sounds more like background music than anything the Boredoms have ever recorded. No matter how fine a trance album this may be, that's a little disappointing. **[Vice, www.vice-recordings.com]**

—Eric Waggoner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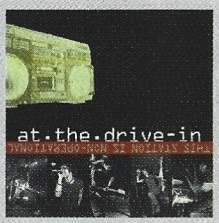
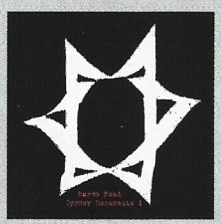


Before forming Mars Volta and Sparta, those bands' members were the creative core of this El Paso quintet. For as fantastic a band as At The Drive-In was, *This Station Is Non-Operational* isn't quite the place to start if you're new to its politically charged punk/emo hybrid. (That'd be the group's final LP, 2000's *Relationship Of Command*.) This collection includes some essential album tracks ("One Armed Scissor," "Fahrenheit") but misses others ("Give It A Name," "Alpha Centauri") in favor of the odd Smiths and Pink Floyd cover. Good, for sure—but not as great as At The Drive-In's legacy deserves. **Bonus Material:** The disc features a DVD with videos (including the six-minute-plus "Invalid Litter Dept."), discography and wallpaper/icons. **[Fearless, www.fearlessrecords.com]**

—Corey duBrowa

BARDO POND
CYPHER DOCUMENTS I



A collection of Internet-only tracks offered through the band's Web site in 1999 and 2000, *Cypher Documents I* easily confuses itself with any number of recent Bardo Pond full-lengths. This isn't exactly a group that keeps its self-editing in check. *Cypher* presents one bona fide classic, "Slag" (where the whole band comes together for a muscular jam), but the rest is mostly moody filler from an outfit that's no stranger to moody filler. Those pining for the relatively succinct and sometimes transcendent sludge rock of the Philly band's early albums need to look elsewhere. For fans? Absolutely. **Bonus Material:** A few of the tracks are slightly different from their mp3 versions; closer "From The Sky" (previously titled "In The Sky") adds more than 25 minutes to the original version. **[Three Lobed, www.threelobed.com]**

—Andrew Earles

BELLE & SEBASTIAN
PUSH BARMAN TO OPEN OLD WOUNDS

The key to unlocking the Belle & Sebastian enigma rests in this curiously titled two-disc set, which gathers the a- and b-sides from the group's reign as King Midas of gentle, timeless pop—a time when everything Stuart Murdoch touched made lonely hearts feel connected. Almost every track on the post-*If You're Feeling Sinister* EPs lived up to that 1997 album's promise, from sweet and tender ("Dog On Wheels," "You Made Me Forget My Dreams") to weirdly wonderful ("Slow Graffiti," "A Century Of Elvis"). These are the quiet, beautiful songs that made Belle & Sebastian seem so monumental for a short time. Even the lesser, later singles ("I'm Waking Up To Us," "Jonathan David," both from 2001) sound nice when nestled against the pinnacles of this 25-song set. **Bonus Material:** The limited-edition version includes a hardbound book. **[Matador, www.matadorrecords.com]**

—Josh Modell

DJ SHADOW
ENDTRODUCING... DELUXE EDITION

Josh Davis—a shy, unassuming white guy from a California college town—didn't invent sampling, scratching, DJ culture or any component of the hip-hop wheel. But when he released *Endtroducing...* in 1996, he made everyone else look square. An instrumental album almost entirely composed of samples and influenced by both prog rock and Public Enemy was, at the time, revolutionary. *Endtroducing...* is still unmatched in its carefree invention: The interrupted beat on "Building Steam With A Grain Of Salt" will blow your mind the first and 50th time you hear it. **Bonus Material:** A 14-track second disc titled *Excessive Ephemera* contains alternate takes, demos, remixes and two tracks previously unreleased on CD. **[Universal/Island, www.universalrecords.com]**

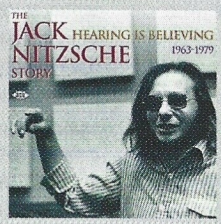
—Matthew Fritch

NATHAN LARSON
FILMMUSIK

Soundtrack work may be the last refuge of indie-rock scoundrels (Jeremy Enigk, Mac McCaughan, et al), but nobody has carved out a second career quite like former Shudder To Think guitarist Larson. He's got great taste in patrons: The mostly instrumental, 22-track *FilmMusik* collects material written for directors Todd Solondz (*Storytelling*), Kimberly Peirce (*Boys Don't Cry*), Stephen Frears (*Dirty Pretty Things*) and others. Larson loves to use vintage guitar tones and reverb to create dreamlike moods. Highlights include *Storytelling*'s "Fiction" (which features the Cardigans' Nina Persson singing childlike vocals) and *High Art*'s "Mom's Mercedes" (which evokes a Brian Eno/Buddy Holly slow dance). **Bonus Material:** Though much of *FilmMusik* is previously unreleased, one bonus track is entirely new: Stunning R&B slow jam "I Want Someone Badly," which Larson originally penned for Jeff Buckley, is sung by its writer, whose breathy falsetto rivals that of Shudder bandmate Craig Wedren. **[Commotion, www.nathanlarson.com]**

—Matthew Fritch

JACK NITZSCHE
HEARING IS BELIEVING: THE JACK NITZSCHE STORY 1962-1979



While most rock fans know Nitzsche through his work with the Stones and Neil Young, his hand in an earlier generation's music bordered on Zelig-like. As chronicled on this 26-song collection of key arranging/producing highlights, Nitzsche's presence was felt in everything from orchestral surf rock (solo hit "The Lonely Surfer") and femme pop (Jackie DeShannon's "Needles And Pins") to Motown (Stevie Wonder's "Castles In The Sand") and Phil Spector (the Righteous Brothers' "Hung On You"). By the late '70s, soundtrack work beckoned, although the inclusion here of cuts Nitzsche produced for Mink DeVille and Graham Parker during the heyday of new wave is testimony to the man's far-reaching taste and influence. **Bonus Material:** The booklet includes previously unseen photos of Nitzsche obtained from his son's archives. **[Ace, www.acerecords.co.uk]**

—Fred Mills

SCRITTI POLITTI
EARLY

Assuming you remember these prefab pop-sampletons from the '80s, rest assured this mish-mash of early indie singles and b-sides reveals no sonic breadcrumb trail leading to the future whereabouts of club staple "Wood Beez (Pray Like Aretha Franklin)" or the pleasures of 1985 hit "Perfect Way." Instead, the scratchy-scratchy dissonance served up here is best described by the Leeds band's leader—the impossibly tall, immaculately fashionable, ever-so-casually communist Green Gartside—in *Early*'s liner notes: "You might say it was music with the questions built in and the assurances left out—otherwise you could just judge it gauche and technically unaccomplished." Uh, quite. **Bonus Material:** Gartside's liner notes. **[Rough Trade, www.roughtradeamerica.com]**

—Corey duBrowa

SLOAN
A SIDES WIN: SINGLES 1992-2005

This handy retrospective falls short of official greatest-hits status on a technicality: None of these songs was

a hit, at least in the U.S. Just like recent best-of collections from the Posies, Big Star and Guided By Voices, nearly every track here sounds like a classic, though. Early singles such as "Underwhelmed" seem mired in '90s modern-rock mediocrity compared to what follows: the shiny, happy "Everything You've Done Wrong," the tight-jeans-and-high-tops revelry of "Money City Maniacs" and the sinful soft rock of "The Other Man." To neophytes, it's Sloan 101. To those who've forgotten, *A Sides Win* is an infectious reminder of the Halifax quartet's way with a riff and a hook. **Bonus Material:** Two new tracks ("Try To Make It" and "All Used Up"). The deluxe version includes a DVD with videos for the previously released tracks, live footage and interviews. **[Koch, www.kochentertainment.com]**

—Patrick Berkery

SON VOLT

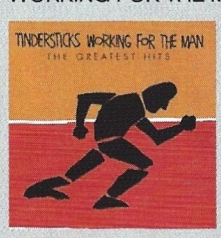
A RETROSPECTIVE: 1995-2000

Jay Farrar has always peaked early. Uncle Tupelo's *No Depression* (1989) was the band's best, just like Son Volt's *Trace* (1995) was tougher, tighter and darker than anything that came after it. Since, Farrar has gone in multiple directions, most of them simultaneously, and never stayed in any one place for very long. *A Retrospective* collects 10 tracks from Son Volt's first three albums, then surrounds them with acoustic demos ("Tear Stained Eye," "Loose String"), country rarities (Del Reeves' "Looking At The World Through A Windshield," Townes Van Zandt's "Rex's Blues"), folk covers (Woody Guthrie's "I've Got To Know," Leadbelly's "Ain't No More Cane"), label promos (Big Star's "Holocaust," Pamela Pollard's "Tulsa County"), live radio cuts ("Medicine Hat") and tributes (Bruce Springsteen's "Open All Night"). It's an odd choice and an uneven set of performances; singing other people's songs isn't really Farrar's strength. But it's also a telling, imperfect picture of an artist in transition. **Bonus Material:** Five songs are previously unreleased. **[Rhino, www.rhino.com]**

—Kenny Berkowitz

TINDERSTICKS

WORKING FOR THE MAN: THE GREATEST HITS

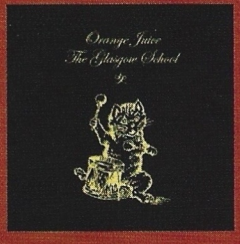


Tindersticks singer Stuart Staples, crucified alongside fellow thief Nick Cave and our savior Leonard Cohen, knows the pain of the cross and the glory of rebirth. But despite the comparisons to Cave and Cohen (and Scott Walker), the gospel that Staples and his Nottingham, England, cohorts preach is more *Interview With The Vampire* than *I'm Your Man*. You wouldn't know it from *Working For The Man*, though, which considers material only through 1999's *Simple Pleasure* and quits after 48 minutes, reducing the Tindersticks' cocktails-in-the-sepulchre spectacle to a mere louche memento. That's a shame, because another half-dozen tracks from the band's heaving early albums (all of which are available in the U.S. as deluxe double-disc imports) would only have strengthened the impact of the solid selections here. **Bonus Material:** Liner notes by writer Michael Hill. **[Koch, www.kochentertainment.com]**

—Scott Wilson

ORANGE JUICE

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL



"Sorry to moan, but it's what I do best," sings Edwyn Collins on Orange Juice's second single, 1980's "Love Sick." But while this Glasgow band's influence would surface later that decade in crooners such as Morrissey and James' Tim Booth, moaning was not necessarily what Orange Juice did best. "Love Sick" is a frantic, witty burst of jangly, quavering guitar pop complete with joyful "whoa-oh-oh" backing vocals. In it, you can hear the roots of bands as diverse as the Wedding Present, Jesus And Mary Chain and fellow Glaswegians Belle & Sebastian and Franz Ferdinand.

The Glasgow School compiles Orange Juice's first four singles. "No more rock 'n' roll for you," the band chants on 1981's "Poor Old Soul (Part Two)," and Collins is serious about reacting to a rock/punk scene that had codified aggression and machismo. OJ's quirky outfits (Collins occasionally sported a coonskin cap) and the exaggerated romanticism of his braying baritone and lovelorn lyrics were confrontational gestures in the punk clubs where the band first played.

Inspired by the Velvet Underground's strummed rhythm guitars, Northern Soul/Chic bass lines and Oscar Wilde's witticisms, the lads released their first single, "Falling And Laughing," in 1979 on Postcard Records, which Glasgow eccentric Alan Horne formed expressly for that purpose. Taking its cue from Motown, Postcard proclaimed itself to be "The Sound Of Young Scotland" and, in its brief heyday, released 45s by OJ's friends/rivals Josef K and Aztec Camera.

The Glasgow School shows the band members' technical abilities occasionally lagging behind their ideas and songwriting skills; Collins' sense of pitch is never consistent. Orange Juice went on to score a U.K. top-40 hit with "Rip It Up," and in 1995, Collins had a surprise solo hit in the U.S. with the irresistible "A Girl Like You." Sadly, he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage in February; as of this writing, he's slowly recovering. That *The Glasgow School* is an essential historical document is unquestionable; that it's full of inventive, subversive, witty charm is undeniable. **Bonus Material:** An album's worth of demos, all of which are previously unreleased in the U.S. Most of these tracks were later re-recorded for Orange Juice's 1982 major-label debut, *You Can't Hide Your Love Forever*. **[Domino, www.dominorecordco.com]**

—Steve Klinge

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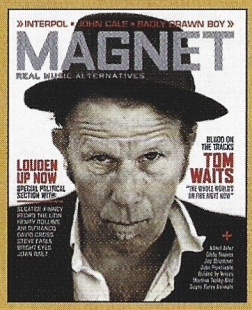

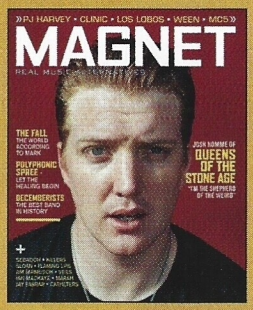

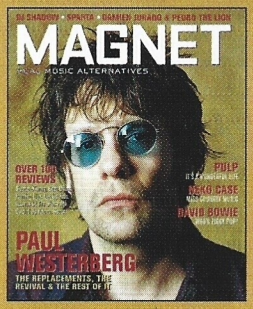

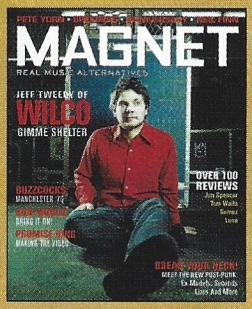

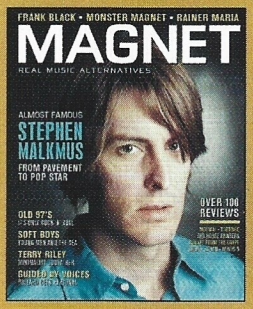

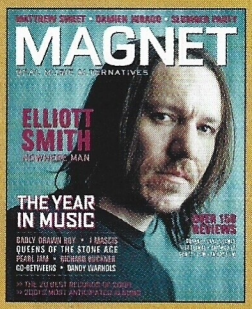

67 SLEATER-KINNEY, Arcade Fire, Jesse Sykes, Moby, Mercury Rev, Michael Gira, Wedding Present, John Davis, Stars, Jesu, Mando Diao, Cass McCombs, Joy Zipper
65 TOM WAITS, Political Section (Steve Earle, Bright Eyes, David Cross, Sleater-Kinney, Jello Biafra and more), Interpol, John Cale, Badly Drawn Boy, John Frusciante, Albert Ayler
64 QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE, Polyphonic Spree, Fall, Clinic, PJ Harvey, Decemberists, Los Lobos, Sebadoh, Ween, Sloan, Killers, Jay Farrar, MC5, Jim Jarmusch, Flaming Lips
63 STROKES, Modest Mouse, Lambchop, The Basement Tapes (Iron & Wine, Jolie Holland and more), Magnetic Fields, Franz Ferdinand, Tortoise, Blonde Redhead, Pedro The Lion
62 ECCENTRICS AND DREAMERS (Robyn Hitchcock, Brian Wilson, Roky Erickson, Love and more), Year In Music (Top 20 LPs Of '03 and more), Elliott Smith, Joe Strummer, Air
61 BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB, Belle & Sebastian, Sleater-Kinney, Rufus Wainwright, '80s College Rock (Miracle Legion, Connells and more), Death Cab For Cutie, Glen Campbell
59 PETE YORN, Grandaddy, Evan Dando, Yo La Tengo, Blur, Idlewild, Liz Phair, New Shoegaze (Stratford 4, Nate Ruth and more), Thorns, Wrens, Verbena, Pinback, Mendoza Line
58 INTERPOL, Lou Barlow, New Pornographers, Cat Power, '70s Cleveland (Pere Ubu, Mirrors and more), Massive Attack, Lucinda Williams, Notwist, Go-Betweens, Lee Hazlewood
57 TOM PETTY, Year In Music (Top 20 LPs Of '02 and more), Pearl Jam, Norway Scene (Kings Of Convenience, Sondre Lerche and more), Johnny Marr, Black Heart Procession
56 THE HISTORY OF POWER POP (Big Star, Cheap Trick, Matthew Sweet, Posies, Flamin' Groovies and more), Queens Of The Stone Age, Shins, Doug Sahm, Interpol, Aimee Mann
55 PAUL WESTERBERG, DJ Shadow, David Bowie, Damien Jurado/Pedro The Lion, Neko Case, Pulp, Sparta, Enon, Comet Gain, Mike Watt, Butthole Surfers, Wire, Go-Betweens
54 WILCO, Pete Yorn, Promise Ring, Buzzcocks, Bob Mould, New Post-Punk (Ex Models, Liars, Erase Errata and more), Neil Finn, Anniversary, Ed Harcourt, Radar Brothers, Mirah
53 THE HISTORY OF SHOEGAZING (My Bloody Valentine, Ride, Lush, Slowdive and more), Stephin Merritt, Dan The Automator, Trail Of Dead, Cornelius, Tanya Donelly, Clinic
51 NICK CAVE, Radiohead, White Stripes, Strokes, Unwound, Ben Folds, Idlewild, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, Steve Wynn, Clean, Ivy, Clientele, Firewater, AMM
50 AIR, 50th Issue Special, Spoon, Pernice Brothers, Paisley Underground (Dream Syndicate, Bangles, Three O'Clock, Rain Parade and more), Ennio Morricone, Lloyd Cole, Minders
49 STEPHEN MALKMUS, Frank Black, Old 97's, Soft Boys, Guided By Voices, Monster Magnet, My Morning Jacket, Terry Riley, Japancakes, Mogwai, Thinking Fellers, Pan Sonic
48 ELLIOTT SMITH, Year In Music (Top 20 LPs Of '00, Queens Of The Stone Age, Pearl Jam, Dandy Warhols and more)
47 STEVE EARLE, Go-Betweens, Jets To Brazil, Damon & Naomi, Tobin Sprout, At The Drive-In, Ken Vandermark
46 WEEN, Dandy Warhols, Wire, Primal Scream, Billy Bragg, Mekons, Pedro The Lion, Delgados, Waxwings, Jennyanykind
45 FLAMING LIPS, Lou Reed, Giant Sand, Steve Earle, Mary Timony, Handsome Family, Elf Power, Kingsbury Manx, Swag
44 YO LA TENGO, Lou Reed, Boss Hog, Flying Saucer Attack, Fu Manchu, Papas Fritas, Eric Bachmann, Departure Lounge
43 WILCO, Year In Music (Magnetic Fields, Flaming Lips, Guided By Voices, Tom Waits, Top 20 LPs Of '99 and more)
42 SUPERCHUNK, Velvet Crush, Melvins, Ronnie Spector, Matmos, Bright Eyes, Handsome Boy Modeling School
40 TOM WAITS, Atari Teenage Riot, Beta Band, Penelope Houston, Mogwai, Chamber Strings, Os Mutantes
37 SUNNY DAY REAL ESTATE, Belle & Sebastian, Saint Etienne, Sloan, Nashville Pussy, Blonde Redhead, Plush
35 GIRLS AGAINST BOYS, Bill Laswell, Cows, Paul Schütze, Caustic Resin, Ui, Witch Hazel Sound, Flaming Lips
34 SONIC YOUTH, Neutral Milk Hotel, Robert Wyatt, Quasi, William Parker, Wheat, To Rococo Rot, Jesus And Mary Chain
33 TORTOISE, Low, Swervedriver, Air, Tommy Keene, Tom Rapp, John Wesley Harding, Pan American, Eliza Carthy
31 STEREOLAB, Steve Albini, Brian Jonestown Massacre, NYC Illbient (DJ Spooky and more), Loop Guru, High Llamas
30 TSUNAMI, Jim O'Rourke, Scott McCaughey, Texas Psych (Charalambides, Mazinga Phaser and more), Shellac
29 JON SPENCER, Bevis Frond, Daft Punk, Echo & The Bunnymen, That Dog, Barbara Manning, Ken Vandermark
28 SHUDDER TO THINK, Bowery Electric, Ladybug Transistor, Jeff Kelly, Swell, Chuck Prophet, Tower Recordings
25 SEBADOH, Versus, Cat Power, Delta 72, Trans Am, Kevin Salem, Frogs, Loud Family, Chamberlain, Deerheart, Killdozer
21 ROCKET FROM THE CRYPT, Top 20 LPs Of '95, Red Red Meat, Clean, Papas Fritas, Mudhoney, Mekons, NoMeansNo
20 BOSS HOG, Calvin Johnson, Gastr del Sol, Air Miami, '68 Comeback, Tar, Bassholes, Eric Matthews, Number One Cup
17 ROYAL TRUX, Roky Erickson, Portastatic, Bands To Watch '95 (Chavez, Bardo Pond, Home and more), Hazel, Gaunt, Lois
9 BEASTIE BOYS, Grifters, Man...Or Astro-Man?, Helium, Aphex Twin, Kramer, Bedhead, Gumball, Alice Donut, Fudge
8 SUPERCHUNK, Nick Cave, Wrens, Thinking Fellers, Rodan, Arcwelder, Surgery, Mule, Dentists, Candy Machine
4 AFGHAN WHIGS, Guided By Voices, Uncle Tupelo, Teenage Fanclub, Spinanes, Smog, Versus, Curve, Small Factory

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and band make brevity a virtue. Like her pals in Spoon (whose drummer, Jim Eno, mixed *Shortly After Take-Off*), Crewe values punchy, skeletal guitar riffs and brittle, stop/start arrangements. Minimal additions (a repeated keyboard note dropping in at the end of "Casino," a counterpoint guitar line slipping into "Come & Get Me") hit with maximal force, and it's no coincidence her label (run by her beau, Matador co-owner Gerard Cosloy) is named for a terse Wire song. *Shortly After Take-Off*'s title may refer to Crewe's (sudden?) move from London to Texas, and departures feature prominently on "Airport Song," among others. The album's focus may be less circumscribed than the automotive-centric *Drive It*, but Crewe still seems to be on a quest to outdistance even car-obsessed Chuck Berry by adding "My Heart's A Motorway," "Good Morning, Aston Martin" and "Rear View Mirror" to her garage full of crafty vehicle metaphors. **[12XU, www.12xu.net]**

—Steve Klinge

DRESSY BESSY
ELECTRIFIED

The eye-popping mod threads displayed by the members of Dressy Bessy on the cover of the band's fifth album are evidence meant to mislead the jury. Is this a tribute to the Troggs, Who and Small Faces? Not even close. Guitarist John Hill, also employed as fretboard muscle for the Apples In Stereo, generates enough raw power here to mask the shortcomings of any old lead vocalist. Fortunately for this Denver foursome, it has one of the most exciting singers around today, the effervescent Tammy Ealom. With a high-octane delivery worth any price-gouging pump total, Ealom slams through all the gears of "Side 2" like a veteran Formula One driver. On "It Happens All The Time," she is coy as hell, trilling, "And though-ough-ough I may lose my smile sometimes," with the cutie-pie savvy of a teenage Wanda Jackson. "She Likes It" and "Small" pound deliciously at the temples like an overstuffed Christmas present for those with feverish dreams of the glory days of CBGB still dancing in their heads. Ealom squeals her way through both tunes with the verve of Debbie Harry fronting a made-in-heaven hybrid of Blondie and the Ramones. Who could ask for more than that? **[Transdreamer, www.transdreamer.com]**

—Jud Cost

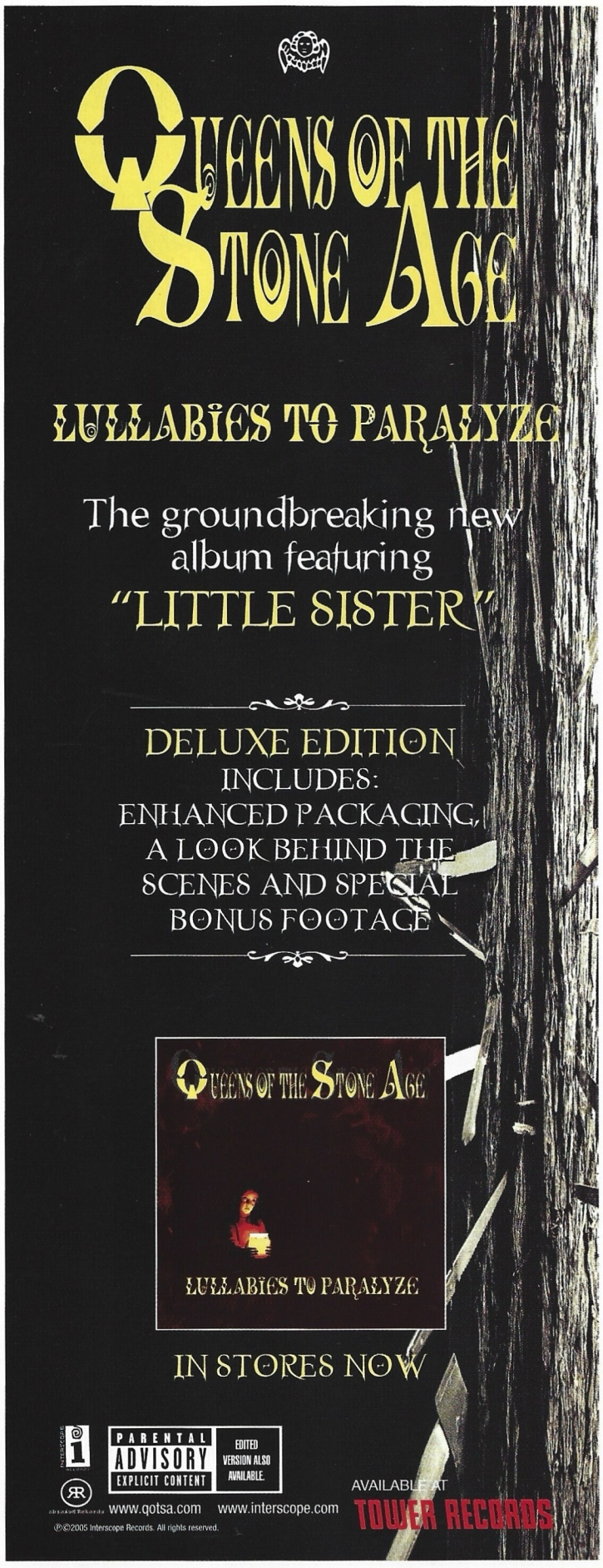
ELECTRELANE
AXES

Someone should call Nordstrom and ask if they're missing a lobby pianist. It appears one may have wandered away from her post and directly into the center of the third release from Brighton, England's Electrelane. Schmaltzy jazz piano runs and lavish organ flourishes form the core of nearly every song on *Axes*, from the downright tinkly "Bells" to the manic, French-café whirl of "Eight

CARIBOU
THE MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS

There's nothing as liberating as a name change; just ask the artist formerly known as The Artist Formerly Known As Prince. But, thankfully, the case of Dan Snaith (a.k.a. Caribou and formerly Manitoba) has nothing to do with personal or creative indulgence. After Snaith released two albums as Manitoba, Dictators frontman Handsome Dick Manitoba threatened a trademark-infringement lawsuit, effectively forcing Snaith to evacuate Manitoba and become Caribou. Whether he's taking advantage of the circumstances or it's a matter of serendipity, Snaith's third album is one big, beautiful personafuck. Part of it is that *The Milk Of Human Kindness* is a big jump from the exuberant mess of 2003's *Up In Flames*, which is a sort of clown-shoegazing spectacle. If that record is a kaleidoscope, *Kindness* is more a box of colored pencils, a collection of distinct possibilities. Snaith wonders what a sugar wall of sound would taste like on "Yeti," a gentle giant of a track that features sweet woodwinds, candy keyboards and see-sawing strings. Here and everywhere, Snaith lets his wanderlust steer, and the album is better for it. *Kindness* rings true—and gorgeously—through experiments with weepy '60s-pop balladry ("Subotnick"), Can-ny resemblance ("Brahminy Kite"), singer/songwriter pop ("Bees") and hip-hop instrumentals ("Lord Leopard," "Pelican Narrows"). Roam, Caribou, roam. **[Domino/Leaf, www.dominorecordco.com]**

—Rich Juzwiak



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Steps" to the Beethoven chords of "Business Or Otherwise." The surprising thing, though, is that the instrumentation actually works. Despite its sentimental moments, the piano serves as a soothing replacement for Verity Susman's featherweight vocals, which scatter themselves throughout *Axes* with even less frequency than on 2003's *The Power Out*. New member Ros Murray anchors the erratic rhythms with gloomy, Cure-like bass lines, and bursts of saxophone ("Gone Darker") and hymnal harmony ("Come Back") add elements of surprise. The one ill-advised moment is a hyperactive cover of Leonard Cohen's "The Partisan," which seems far too traditional in this setting. *Axes* comes off as a spikier, more experimental Stereolab or a more adept Raincoats. If this is the worst thing that happens when jazz pianists go bad, it's time to start corrupting. **[Too Pure, www.toopure.com]**

—Tizzy Asher

FEIST
LET IT DIE

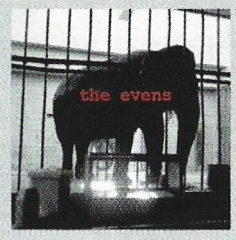
If you're just tuning in to *Let It Die*, you're late; it was released in Europe and Canada last year to mass fawning. But we'll proceed with introductions, anyway: Meet Canadian native Leslie Feist, the anti-singer/songwriter. After spending years traipsing around genres, fluttering from punk beginnings to a spot on a tour with electrotrash provocateur Peaches to guest turns on downright tasteful albums by Kings Of Convenience and Broken Social Scene, Feist settles down on her ostensibly agreeable sophomore album. *Let It Die* brims with sweet melodies, gentle bossa-nova/folk tendencies and polite electronics (the programmed drums of the title track go "kick, Mississippi, snare, Mississippi," so as not to offend). But deep down, the album is full of dissent, albeit of a bland variety. Its ultimate function is to destroy the notion of the confessional singer/songwriter, as Feist fills it with songs that aren't her own (six of the 11 were written by other people, Ron Sexsmith and the Bee Gees among them) and otherwise refuses to look you in the eye. Her lovely voice never fails to sound like someone else's; here she's Chan Marshall, there she's Portishead's Beth Gibbons, way over there she's alternately Joni Mitchell and Sade. This may be the point, but it's also the problem. The sparse production has more character than she does, and even that's just weird-lite, at best. **[Cherrytree/Interscope, www.cherrytreerecords.com]**

—Rich Juzwiak

FOUR TET
EVERYTHING ECSTATIC

Despite Kieran Hebden's music being completely laptop-driven and largely reliant on samples from a vast record collection that includes avant jazz, pastoral folk and psych, it contains a joy that suggests it was crafted outdoors. For five albums, Hebden (a.k.a. Four Tet) has washed over rhythms and electronic

EVENS
THE EVENS



Fugazi's Ian MacKaye joins the Warmers' Amy Farina for this hooky, jittery album consisting of nothing but drums, baritone guitar and vocals, all minimally processed and produced. Though it's the D.C. pair's debut release, MacKaye and Farina have been collaborating since 2001, and *The Evens* sounds like it's been stewing in acrid wartime juices; Vaselines-style harmonies lend a misleading sweetness to songs that deal mostly with surveillance and fear. Now an *eminence grise* at age 43, MacKaye still writes the most oblique and paranoid lyrics in indie rock ("Balancing a body on the ground/Seems harder to do on two feet/Than to do face down/And enemies must be all around"), and Farina's metronomic pulse ticks away like a clock wired to a briefcase bomb. But nothing ever explodes on *The Evens*, which eschews Fugazi-style noise in favor of subtle dynamics and unsettling clarity. The tension on this very angry record culminates on its angriest cut, "You Won't Feel A Thing," until, as MacKaye and Farina remind us, "you wake up." There's blood all over these tracks, but whether it comes from hesitation cuts or defensive wounds is impossible to tell. As usual, no witnesses are talking. **[Dischord, www.dischord.com]**

—Eric Waggoner

[Singles/EPs]

!!!
TAKE ECSTASY WITH ME

With a bass line that sounds like *American Idol* at the Bronze, the cover of the Magnetic Fields' "Take Ecstasy With Me" shakes !!!'s grimy black tail feather in our glossy reality even as it throws up vital electrolytes at some netherworld rave. But the song isn't jacked on anything stronger than Red Bull; after a crystalline first minute, the New Order keyboards and low-moan exhortation of the title simply freeze over. The cover of Nate Dogg's "Get Up," though, kicks like an aerobics class for nerds. **[Touch And Go, www.tgrec.com]**

—Scott Wilson

CLEARLAKE
WONDER IF THE SNOW WILL SETTLE

Like forebears the Smiths, Suede and Gene, Clearlake is forging a (very British) identity through sound *and* vision. The Brighton band's singles and albums bear a consistent typeface and similar sleeve designs. (Evidently, Clearlake favors photographs of trees.) But where are the killer b-sides? Though some of the tunes on this seven-song EP are previously import-only, technically, nothing here is new. But the title track is still the best thing from last year's *Cedars*, the cover of Neil Young's "Cinnamon Girl" is faithful-yet-fun, and a new, melodeon-heavy mix of "Almost The Same" makes it Clinic-ally safe. **[Domino, www.dominorecordco.com/usa]**

—Matthew Fritch

DANDI WIND
BAIT THE TRAPS

Throbbing, electro-heavy, dance-floor performance art abounds on the six-song debut from this industrial-damaged Vancouver duo. Spastic chanteuse Dandi Wind and keyboard wizard Szam Findlay make Teutonic-inflected electronic sculptures on "Drawing Straws." Meanwhile, the kraut/glam buoyancy of "Ueno Park Boogie" conjures memories of '80s electro acts Liaisons Dangereuses and DAF accentuated by a Middle Eastern vibe and injected with the eccentric character of Polly Harvey and Lene Lovich. **[Bongo Beat, www.bongobeat.com]**

—Ron Bally

EARLY MAN
EARLY MAN

The aggressively underwhelming nail in indie metal's coffin, Early Man is to real metal what A.R.E. Weapons is to Suicide. These New York City hipsters dress like authentic dirtballs, and their three-song debut (a full-length on Matador is due this fall) feels out a distant territory per track. The first ("Fight") is *And Justice For All*-era Metallica, the next ("Death Is The Answer To My Prayers") is by-the-numbers Black Sabbath, and the last ("The Undertaker Is Calling You") is Accept as interpreted by the Fucking Champs. **[Monitor, www.monitorrecords.com]**

—Andrew Earles

IVYTREE/CHRIS SMITH
SPLIT SERIES 17

The four short songs that frame the Ivytree half of this split 12-inch suggest that despite a penchant for amorphous improvising, Glenn Donaldson's muse flourishes in more structured settings. His slightly hoarse voice and patient acoustic picking radiate stoned intimacy; the much longer instrumental at the platter's heart morphs organically from human to insect drone. On the other side, terrific Australian electric guitarist Smith offers five hissing, clangorous instrumentals that negotiate freer terrain with assurance and grace. **[Fatcat, www.fat-cat.co.uk]**

—Bill Meyer

PELA
ALL IN TIME

Rock is littered with the carcasses of "the next U2"s, so it's sort of unsettling to come across a band that actually sounds like the Irish demigods. New York's Pela is a scrappy four-piece with the stones and skills to pull off the clean, shimmery, wide-open guitar stuff; frontman Billy Swanson unabashedly works that plaintive-moaning shtick. "Lattitudes" is a bouncy little ditty about bitter island locals who must take in their laundry for the tourists, "All In Time" is a hopeful examination of a relationship in a hopeless rut, and "Venom" perfectly captures the poison of a love that's dead but never buried. **[Brassland, www.brassland.org]**

—Brian Howard

DEXTER ROMWEBER DUO/THROW RAG
TEN BAD STUDS

This vinyl-only 12-inch samples five cuts apiece from erstwhile Flat Duo Jets frontman Romweber and demonic San Francisco retardo rockers Throw Rag. The former is heard live and lo-fi, essaying his patented skronkabilly ("Curse Of The Little Bastard") alongside his equally patented brand of '50s croon pop ("Dreams Don't Cost A Thing"). Among the latter's highlights: the stomping, surfadelic "Desert Shores" and a surreal slab of Cramps-y swamp rock inscrutably titled "D.H.S." **[Demon Beach, www.demonbeachrecords.com]**

—Fred Mills

ALINA SIMONE
PRETTIER IN THE DARK

The six songs on this beautiful debut obsess over capturing minute physical details. Sulfur lights glare down on a romance as it unfolds in a parked car ("Louisiana Song"), and white church spires pierce the sky behind the local pawnshop where lovers converge ("Cash America Pawn"). The instrumentation—spare guitar and cello with minimal drums—leaves Simone's aching, Rebecca-Gates-meets-Chan-Marshall voice exposed and vulnerable. **[Fractured, www.fractured-discs.com]**

—Tizzy Asher

CROOKED FINGERS
SLEEP ALL SUMMER

Just in case reviews of Crooked Fingers' latest album, *Dignity And Shame*, gave you the impression Eric Bachmann had gone lovey-dovey, this seven-inch restores his status as a magnificently miserable bastard. Each side contains an acoustic, finger-picked *Dignity* downer recorded live in a Philadelphia church last winter, and Delgados tourmates Alan Barr (cello) and Emma Pollock (vocals) back him on "Sleep All Summer." Bachmann's voice on "You Must Build A Fire" gets plenty of natural echo, emphasizing the isolation of his "where are you, love?" pleas. The man is a lighthouse of loneliness; the songs are his beacon. **[Eastern Fiction, www.easternfiction.com]**

—Matthew Fritch

SOFT EXPLOSIONS
RIDE BETWEEN THE EYES

These *Little Steven's Underground Garage* battle-of-the-bands champions demonstrate it takes more than just velocity, Farfisa organs and tight denim to shake the foundation. The menacing guitar coursing through "Ride Between The Eyes" sounds like the Stooges attacking the *Peter Gunn* theme. Enter the mostly rapped vocal—frontman David Kuland sounds like he's stuttering his way out of a sticky situation while some thug shakes him by the lapels—and the message becomes clear: It ain't all about the Mooney Suzuki anymore. **[Canarsie, www.canarsierecords.com]**

—Patrick Berkery

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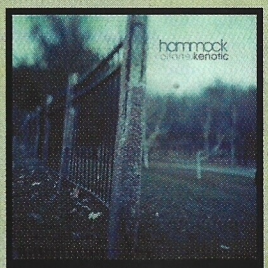

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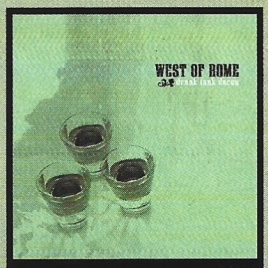

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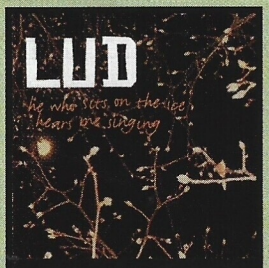

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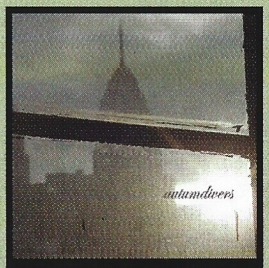

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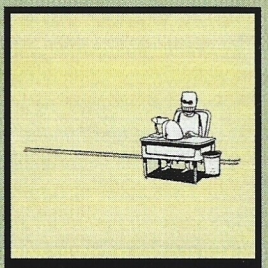

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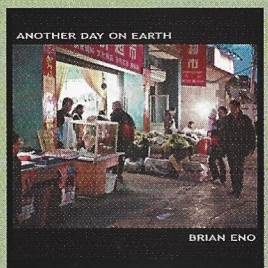

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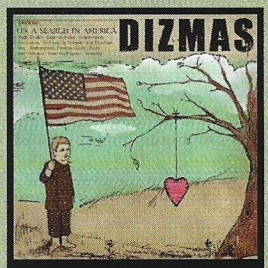

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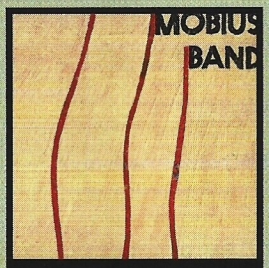

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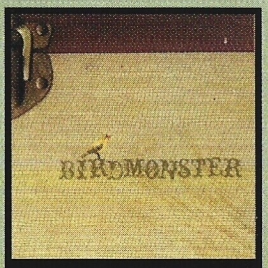

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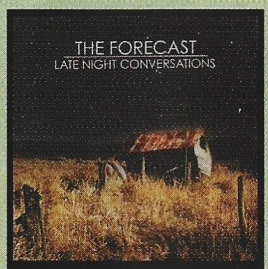

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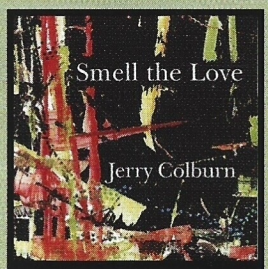

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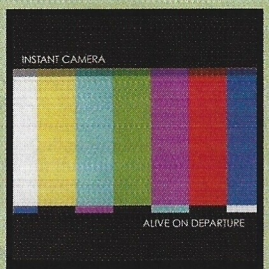

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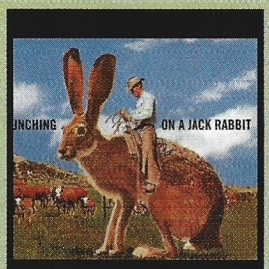

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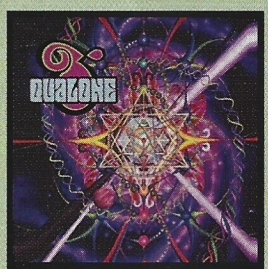

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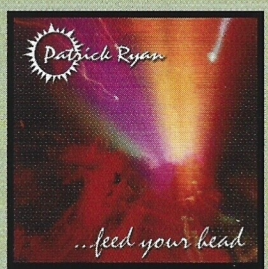

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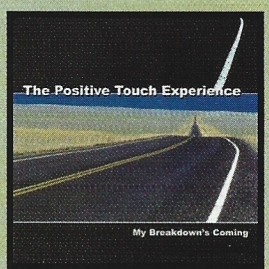

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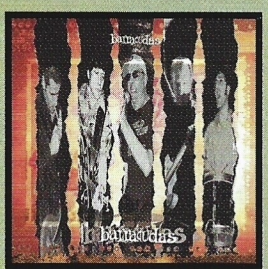

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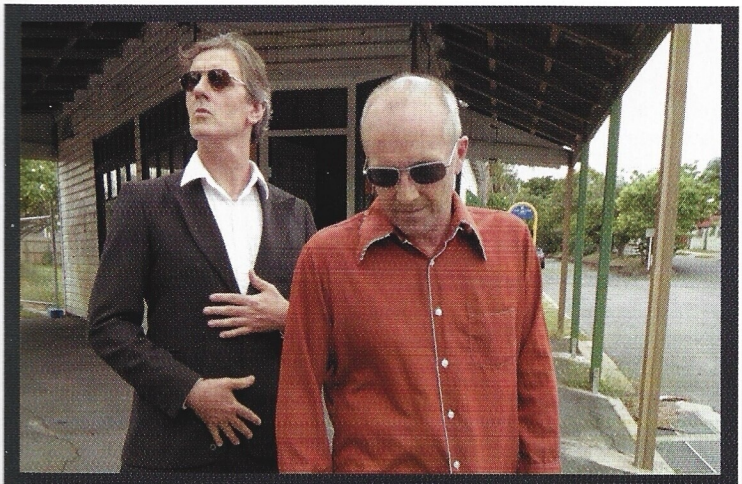

GO-BETWEENS • OCEANS APART

If Australia's Go-Betweens had gotten that big pop hit they'd been clamoring so desperately for 20 years ago, they might at this stage be indulging, U2-style, an arena-size nostalgia trip or plunging dumbly into adult-contemporary hell, *a la* R.E.M. They didn't get that hit, though, and instead they've made *Oceans Apart*, their best record since reuniting five years ago. It's warmer and fuller than 2000's *The Friends Of Rachel Worth* and more focused than 2003's lackluster *Bright Yellow, Bright Orange*. Musically, Robert Forster and Grant McLennan have abandoned the nervous post-(graduate)-punk that characterizes their earliest work, settling comfortably inside crisp, guitar-driven pop songs. They ride two rails: remembrance and regret. On "Boundary Rider," McLennan turns an aging border patrolman into a devastating metaphor for emotional isolation, and on "Darlinghurst Nights," Forster takes a slow stroll through his early 20s as a literate punk in Sydney. On both of these songs, the protagonists face a litany of bad decisions and burned bridges. In the end, the answer is the same as it's always been: Turn around and keep walking.

MAGNET woke up Forster at his home in Brisbane to pester him about the present and past.

I've started watching *24*, and the name of the corrupt company on the show is McLennan-Forster. I never realized you guys were so devious.

[*Laughs*] I know! We found out about that when we did a press tour. All of a sudden, these questions started to pop up about *24*. I guess someone who likes the group writes for the show. I think it's just fantastic.

This record seems to have reminiscence as one of its themes.

Yeah, that's true. I feel quite comfortable going backwards. Pop is very much in the now, or even futuristic, but there's material there; it's part of my life. Part of it, I think, was moving back to Brisbane.

On "Darlinghurst Nights," you mention Clint Walker, Andy Wilson and other people you knew from around the Australian punk scene in the late '70s and early '80s. What got you thinking about all that again?

Well, we mixed our last record down in Sydney, and we were staying at a hotel just outside Darlinghurst. I was sort of walking through the city every morning; strangely enough, I saw Clint when I was down there, and it just lodged in my brain. Andy Wilson lives up here in Brisbane; he's an architect now. I see him every couple of months. I had been working on a song, and this opening line just came to me: "I opened a notebook/It read the Darlinghurst Dears." And then writing it was easy, bringing back all those feelings of when you're 26 or 27—all those dreams and all the people I knew. I feel like the modern sentiment is always, "Don't look backwards, you'll be swallowed."

In a lot of your early work, there was an element of anger or hostility toward the subjects of the songs. That's been downplayed on the last three records.

That's true, but I wouldn't say that's always going to be so. I just don't think we've found the right music. I write down song titles—I have one called "Television Kills Children"—and it's quite combative. I just need the music to it. But those feelings aren't gone. **[Yep Roc, www.yeproc.com]**

—J. Edward Keyes

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bleepery with chimes, psalteries, chants and strummed guitars, nearly making his laptop a folk instrument. But labeling him a 21st-century hurdy-gurdy man would be akin to saying Eastern Sudanese trumpet music is primitive. "Sun Drums and Soil" uses the heft of New Orleans funeral drum precision to reach a climax that's simply electric. "High Fives," with a minimal, timpani-like thud cupping vinyl scratches and bird chirps, exists in a space somewhere between Pete Rock and Tony Conrad's work with Faust. "Smile Around The Face" is delicious, not for its smart sampling of Can drummer Jaki Liebezeit's percussive propulsion, but because its computer-enhanced gospel harmony simply moves mountains. Think of a more organic Prefuse 73, the whole Anticon crew on Valium with their mouths taped shut and, well, forget it. As with 2003's *Rounds* and 2001's *Pause*, *Everything Ecstatic* emphasizes melodic intention in a manner that transcends electronica or the outer reaches of experimental hip hop. The result is an accessibility that doesn't subtract anything from Hebden's ability to provoke thought, crack smiles or induce visions. **[Domino, www.dominorecordco.com]**

—Bruce Miller

GREAT LAKE SWIMMERS
GREAT LAKE SWIMMERS

Stop us if you've heard this one: World-weary, teary-eyed outsider pens 10 soft-strum ballads about the weight of life's great troubles. With freaked-out inmates Devendra Banhart and Joanna Newsom running the new-Americana asylum, it should give folk fans pause to hear a group play it straight. That is, if Toronto's Great Lake Swimmers weren't already beaten to the punch by Sam Beam, Damien Jurado, Mark Kozelek and countless other guitar-toting hushed-puppies. Doubtless, for anyone who's soaked up Sun Kil Moon's short, sweet catalog, this debut treads little new ground. Some details about the album—that it was recorded in an abandoned silo, the presence of a tape-hiss chorus of crickets—may seem like a stab at forced authenticity. That's not to say there aren't some stunning surprises. Tony Dekker delivers simple, devastating refrains such as "Oh hands, don't fail me now" and "This is not like home" that'll stick in your synapses for days. But, please, somebody hose down those hot-and-bothered British critics. Flicking out four pretty chords on an acoustic doesn't make you the second coming of Nick Drake, and Dekker would be the first to admit it: Drake was eerier and superior. **[Misra, www.misrarecords.com]**

—Noah Bonaparte Pais

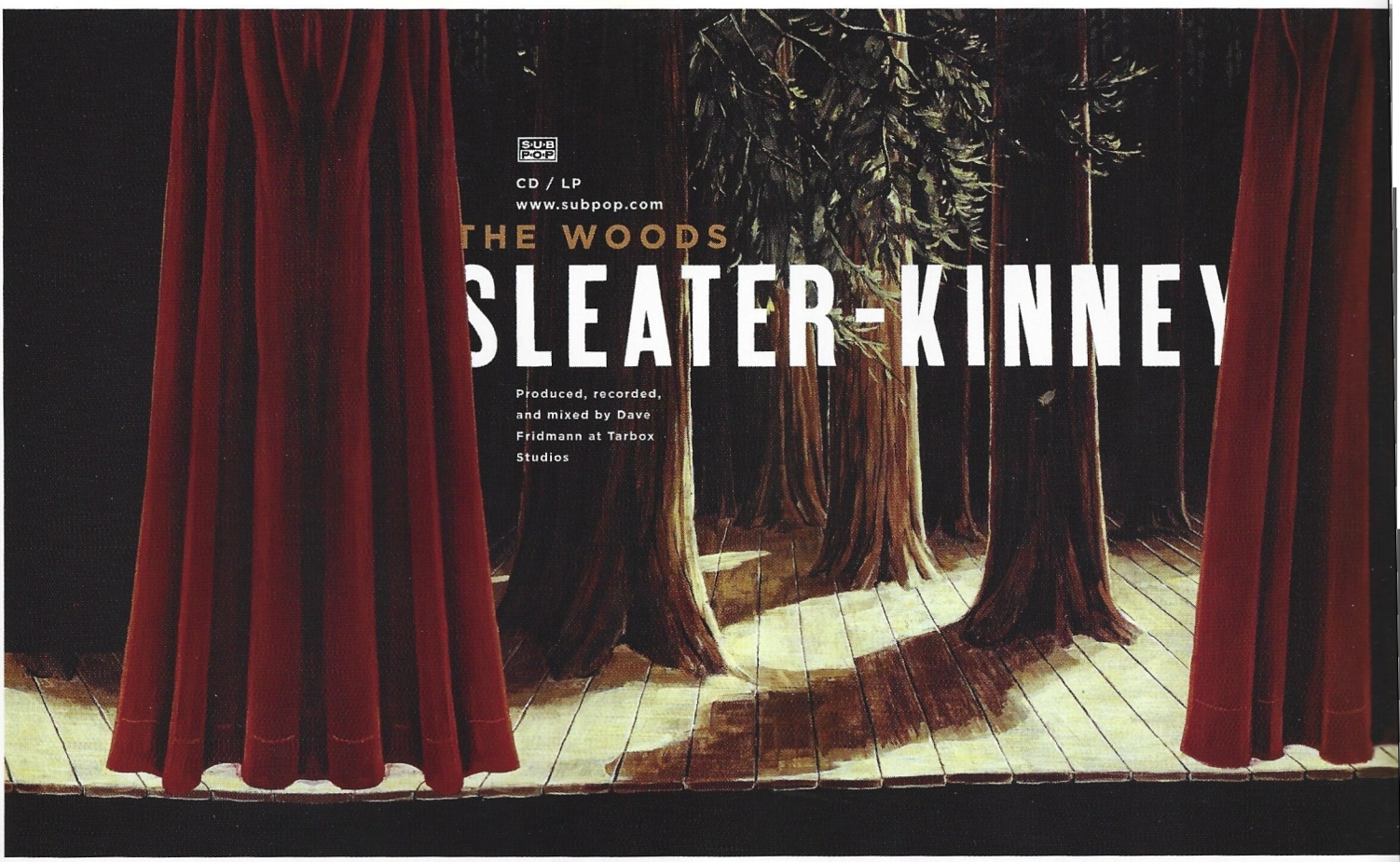
GREATER CALIFORNIA
SOMBER WURLITZER

Between the release of the Long Beach group's debut, 2002's *The Little Pacific*, and this sophomore platter, Greater California stumbled across, you guessed it, a Wurlitzer. So enchanted were the band members with their new electric piano and the spooky sounds it makes, they threw themselves and their mellow, down-tempo beach pop head first into a dark and dusky tribute. They recorded in a town outside San Diego called El Cajon and stayed up late tracking songs (from midnight to 5 a.m.) for that bleary-eyed feel. And, well, yay. Good for them. Greater California has made a Friends Of Dean Martinez record, minus the sometimes compelling songwriting and plus, yes, a Wurlitzer. There's nothing wrong with moody soundscapes, but *Somber Wurlitzer* is so one-note—and that note would be "somber"—there's little to grab on to. That the 10 tracks are populated by the sort of abstract lyrical imagery that turns kids off poetry in high school doesn't help. "People move in the new sound/All the goodness around," sings Terry Prine on "Missing Summer." Then there's "Jersey Thursday," with "Night brought on its purple cloak of velvet to the sky." The notes I jotted down while listening include asides such as "spooky Wurlitzer intro," "Wurlitzer breakdown" and "Wurlitzer solo—Doors-y?" Let's hope we never have to endure *Melancholy Moog*. **[Earthling, www.earthlingrecords.com]**

—Brian Howard

JAGA JAZZIST
WHAT WE MUST

Jaga Jazzist represents everything about Norway's exploding scene that will make it the epicenter for what's next in music: serious free-jazz chops, spacey guitar frippery, soaring wordless choruses and awesome beards. The 10-member Norwegian outfit (playing trumpet, trombone, guitar, bass, tuba, bass clarinet, sax, Fender Rhodes, vibraphone and a rack of electronics) falls somewhere between prog rock's scope and bombast and jazz label ECM's strident devotion to the minutiae of sound, form and—yes, my hippie friends—feeling. Perhaps unavoidably, there's also just a hint of Chicago-style post-rock in some of the more nerdy melodic play and repetition. But the live feel of *What We Must* and the outstanding quality of the recording relay urgency without pomp and an epic tone without brutality. It's true ensemble work that dexterously and joyfully weaves solos and choruses, looseness and tightness, layers and space. Though Jaga



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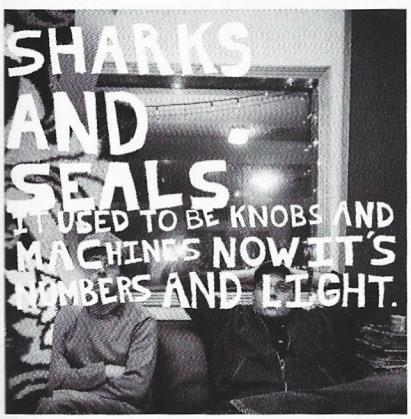

SHARKS AND SEALS
IT USED TO BE KNOBS AND MACHINES NOW IT'S NUMBERS AND LIGHT

Started mostly as a documentation of their largely improvised music, Sharks and Seals came to be more by accident than by intention. The unique and exciting It Used To Be Knobs and Machines and Now It's Numbers and Light features appearances by Ryan Rhapsys, RobRoy Cambell, Tim Kinsella, Amy Cargill and shatters any chance of comparison.

Brimming with memorable melodies, menacing rhythms, blips of digital trickery and smatterings of swirling and fragmented guitar. The debut release from Sharks and Seals will leave an impression of warm delight followed by introspective wonderment.

DEF HARMONIC
All These Worldz

All These Worldz is the 2nd full Length by electro-funk hip hop outfit Def Harmonic. After a number of 12" releases, an EP and one Full Length their sound has melded into an outer space head funk for dance floors and living spaces all over the galaxy. On the planet earth their music is played on fine radio shows internationally from the US west coast to the BBC to eastern Europe and Japan.

Also released this year is the Spaced Out 12" on Wobblyhead Records. Spaced Out received URB magazines cut of the month and All These Worldz is a deeper look into Def Harmonic

SUPERAQUELLO
BIEN GORGEOUS

Bien Gorgeous is the follow up to the band's well received debut, and continues on their path of infectious experimental pop and captivating Spanish vocals.
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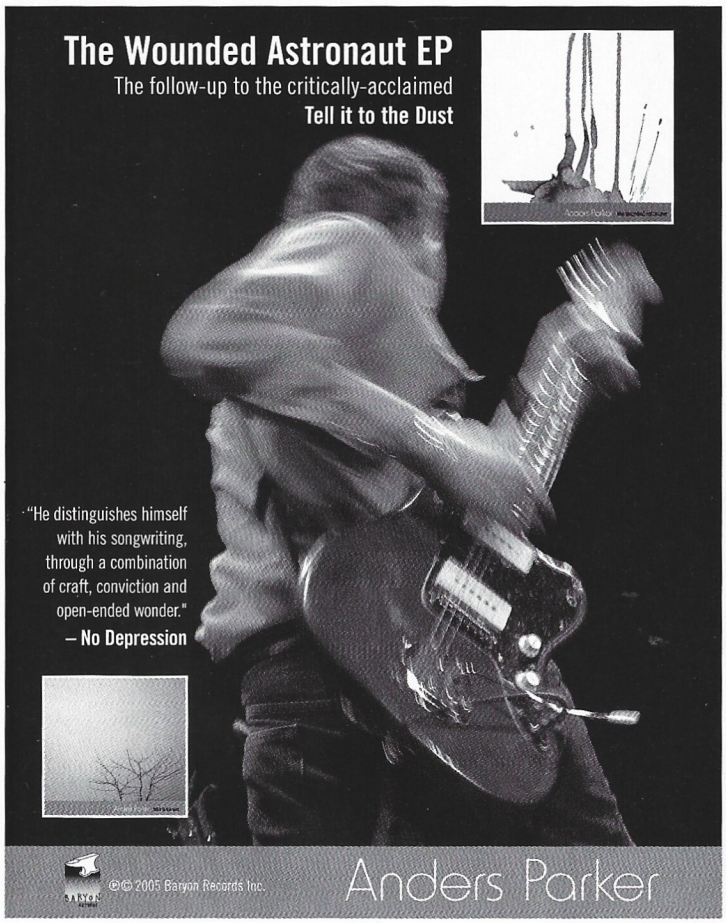
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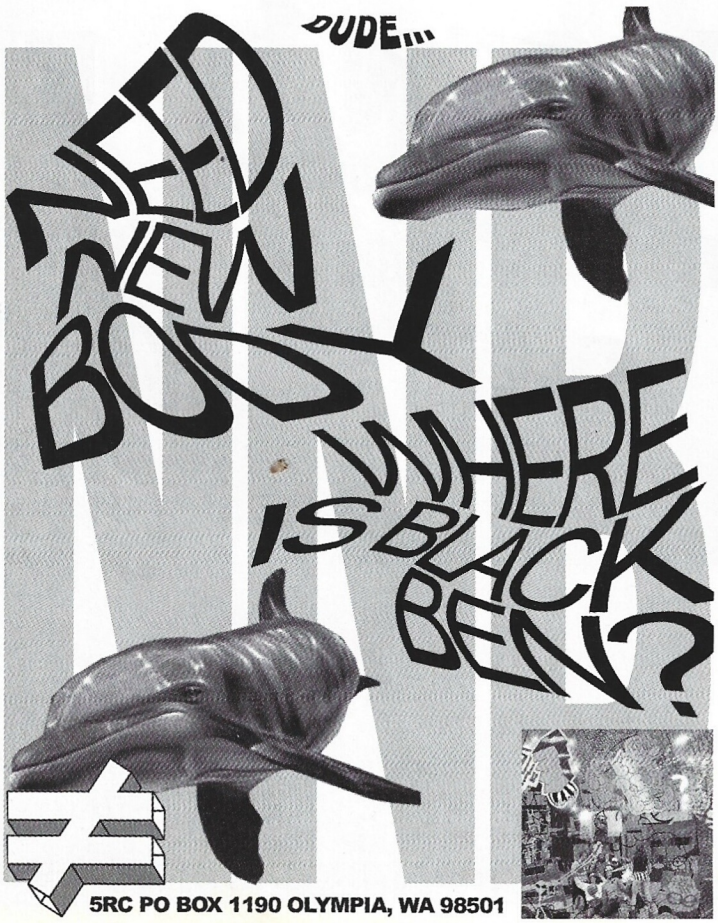


HOLD STEADY • SEPARATION SUNDAY

That music critics never fail to be heavy-handed when quoting the Hold Steady's lyrics is just one clue to the big-picture ingenuity of singer/guitarist Craig Finn. Sure, the Hold Steady is a band propelled by critical acclaim. (Last year's *Almost Killed Me* showed up on the best-records-you-didn't-hear lists of MAGNET, *Spin* and *Rolling Stone*.) But it was old, reliable necessity that really invented the Hold Steady's brand of smart bar rock. If the current musical era is ruled by reconstituted new wave and post-punk prettyboys like the Rapture and Franz Ferdinand then the New York quintet's guitar solos, E Street Band keyboards and AC/DC riffs are kryptonite, and thirtysomething everyman Finn is a ranting antihero. He's the perfect narrator for the outsiders who inhabit the songs on *Separation Sunday*. With a vocal bark that bears the bite marks of the Fall's Mark E. Smith and Andrew Dice Clay, Finn rails off a detailed narrative of drug-addicted fast times and growing up Catholic. *Separation Sunday* is a book-on-tape, a grim and funny tome that draws from the Bible ("Cattle And The Creeping Things") and *Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas* ("Multitude Of Casualties"). The twin themes of religion and addiction dovetail with the album's main character going down to the river, dunking her head toward a nitrous tank and being born again. Or born to run. Or whatever. Oh, and the obligatory lyrical selection: "I grew up in denial/And I went to school in Massachusetts."

MAGNET spoke to Finn about twin themes and the Twin Cities.

***Separation Sunday* seems inspired by growing up in Minneapolis.**

The first record was really off the cuff; we did it in six days. This record took almost a month and was very deliberate. It has a lot of themes of being in a suburban place and also being Catholic, two things that were very much a part of me growing up.

The lyrics about rehab and recovery might prompt the question of whether you've gone to AA or NA.

I was thinking about how these are desperate characters whose lives change quickly, and because of that, they make an interesting story that moves along. One of the things the record is about is being stuck out in the suburbs, pre-Internet. Before the Internet and cell phones, I felt like the urban myth—the things that got passed along in an oral tradition—was stronger. "Stevie Nix" is sort of about that. You heard about how Rod Stewart got his stomach pumped because he blew all the dudes in his band. Everyone heard that, nobody knew who started it, and these were the facts that were available.

Both Hold Steady records are contemptible of the '80s and new wave. Why?

For someone who lived through the '80s the first time, it wasn't cool or funny or cute. It was embarrassing. It was the Reagan era, a really ugly time. Like, you're working at some office park in suburban St. Louis and you go to TGI Friday's and they put on an '80s mix. I think that's super lame. For the Faint to come out and do a Depeche Mode thing, that's just as lame. At the same time, [the Hold Steady] could be accused of doing something from a different era. **[Frenchkiss, www.frenchkissrecords.com]**

—Matthew Fritch

(Sound Advice)

EARTH

LIVING IN THE GLEAM OF AN UNSHEATHED SWORD
LEGACY OF DISSOLUTION

Dylan Carlson's Earth project has been wetting the pants of experimental-metal freaks since 1990, its individual treatment of the riff predating and influencing later sloth-like doomsters such as Sunn O))) and Sleep. These two new releases perfectly represent both sides of the Earth coin: The Pacific Northwest band vacillates between thoughtful song construction and the kind of tossed-off riffing anyone with a distortion box could do.

Living In The Gleam Of An Unsheathed Sword is only for blind sycophants, of which Earth has no shortage. Billed as a new album, it's actually two live recordings from 2002. The first, "Dissolution III," is nothing more than Carlson stabbing away at his guitar unaccompanied for 15 minutes in a distorted, but not at all pretty or ambient, fashion. Like jury duty or staring at your hand for eight hours, it will only appeal to daily heroin users. The nearly hour-long title track benefits from a drummer and actually pulls itself together into a discernable dirge that nonetheless goes nowhere.

Carlson's judgment about what material he deems release-worthy (he tours often yet can only give fans *Living In The Gleam*?) shouldn't overshadow the fact that there are some incredible Earth albums. Two are highlighted on *Legacy Of Dissolution*, the inevitable remix record. Autechre sweeps the contest with a reworked version of "Coda Maestoso In F (Flat) Minor" from 1996's *Pentastar: In The Style Of Demons*. The original is used to great ends in the documentary *Kurt & Courtney*. (The same could be said for Carlson himself; he bought the shotgun Cobain, an early member of Earth, used to commit suicide.) Justin Broadrick goes back to 1995's awesome, out-of-print Sub Pop album *Phase 3: Thrones And Dominions* for "Harvey," a buzzing creeper that employs a bowel-evacuating low end and should strike the fancy of anyone rightfully blown away by Broadrick's Jesu project. Jim O'Rourke and Russell Haswell also take their canvases from *Phase 3*, and if this worthy remix foray accomplishes anything, it should put a flame under Sub Pop's ass to reissue *Phase 3*. **[Megablade/Troubleman, www.troublemanunlimited.com; No Quarter, www.noquarter.net]**

—Andrew Earles

NEAL CASAL

RETURN IN KIND

COBRA VERDE

COPYCAT KILLERS

MAGNET associate editor Fred Mills and his cynical alter ego, Doc Rock, take a ride on the covers side.

Mills: Respected artists such as David Bowie and Nick Cave have done all-covers albums, but is it an exercise in homage or evidence of creative burnout?

Rock: Neither. It's just a fast, cheap way to get product into the stores and earn some dough when you're between "real" albums. Take Casal, for example. He's issued a slew of sparkling solo records and played with everyone from the Beachwood Sparks to Badly Drawn Boy, yet for *Return In Kind*, he sounds as inspired as a groveling coffeehouse folkie whose idea of a hot date is an Iron & Wine concert.

Cobra Verde

Mills: You think overhauling Royal Trux's "Yellow Kid" as a country/gospel ditty ain't inspired? What about setting Johnny Thunders & The Heartbreakers' "It's Not Enough" to piano? And Ronnie Lane's "Debris" here is as haunting and luminous as the Faces' original. OK, turning to *Copycat Killers*, Cobra Verde brings together Pink, New Order, Flamin' Groovies, Leonard Cohen, Fall, Troggs and Donna Summer to get the party started.

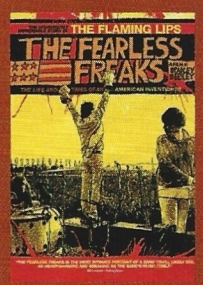
Rock: A Quaalude party, maybe. Kicking it off with a Pink cover should be a red flag. I mean, come on: Hawkwind's "Urban Guerilla" done like an Asbury Jukes R&B number? The Stones' "Play With Fire" for bongos and synth?

Mills: You're a purist *and* a cynic. If nothing else, uncovering the power-pop roots of the Undertones' "Teenage Kicks" and Mott The Hoople's "Rock And Roll Queen" scores with me. Listen pal, rock 'n' roll will never die as long as musicians can treat it with respect *and* irreverence. **[Fargo, www.fargorecords.com; Scat, www.scatrecords.com]**

tip sheet

FLAMING LIPS

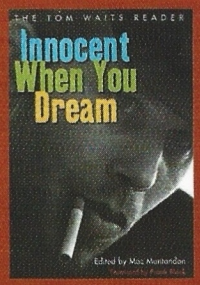
THE FEARLESS FREAKS



Frankly, we're bored to death of the Lips' gimmicky sideshow attractions: the bunny suits, the fake blood, Wayne Coyne crowd-surfing in a giant plastic bubble, etc. *The Fearless Freaks*, a 110-minute documentary DVD, is the band's real story. Especially fascinating are the Coyne family's home movies from the '70s (showing Wayne's *Dazed And Confused*-like upbringing in Oklahoma) and the brutal footage that addresses Steven Drozd's heroin addiction. **[Shout! Factory, www.shoutfactory.com]**

INNOCENT WHEN YOU DREAM: THE TOM WAITS READER

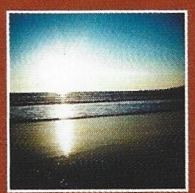
EDITED BY MAC MONTANDON



This collection of articles and interviews—culled from newspapers, magazines (including MAGNET), radio and TV—reveals almost nothing about the real Tom Waits. And that's a real achievement for the musician and character actor who charms journalists into half-believing his tall tales. "On what occasions do you lie?" asks *Vanity Fair*. Waits replies, "Who needs an occasion?" *Innocent When You Dream* includes a foreword by Frank Black. **[Thunder's Mouth, www.thundersmouth.com]**

ORANGES BAND

THE WORLD & EVERYTHING IN IT



It seems fitting that Oranges Band frontman Roman Kuebler played bass for Spoon circa 2001's classic-sounding *Girls Can Tell*. His vocal melodies sound like they're lifted from golden oldies, but his Baltimore-based band is a lean, post-punk guitar machine. Crooning softly and rocking hard, *The World & Everything In It* imagines Johnny Mathis' head affixed to Tom Verlaine's body. **[Lookout!, www.lookoutrecords.com]**

Jazzist has been around for 11 years, the group is just now maturing, and over the past few years, its members have played a part in every major musical project in Norway (from Tahiti 80 to Turbonegro). Also, like its national music scene, Jaga Jazzist has turned into something artful, engaging and, perhaps, visionary. **[Ninja Tune, www.ninjatune.net]**

—J. Gabriel Boylan

KINSKI
ALPINE STATIC

Kinksi has always had its collective heart in the right place, but the band's instrumental space rock always seemed rather earthbound. Then, last year, the tiny Strange Attractors label released *Don't Climb On And Take The Holy Water*, an excellent collection of live and rehearsal-room jams issued with the self-effacing caveat that it wasn't a "real" album. Also in 2004, the Seattle band did a fine job backing Acid Mother Temple frontman Kawabata Makoto on a U.S. tour. Turns out what Kinski needed to do all along was cast off the shackles of its songs, either by playing someone else's or just tuning into whatever was blowing on the cosmic currents. It's too bad these freeing experiences didn't exert more influence on *Alpine Static*. It's not that the band's structured material lacks merit; "Hot Stenographer" kicks things off in obsessive fashion, worrying a Golden Earring-like riff to the bone, and "The Party Which You Know Will Be Heavy" would fit right in on one of Sonic Youth's harder-rocking *Musical Perspectives* EPs from a few years back. But even these tracks, swell as they are, don't take you any place you haven't been before. The hooks fail to sink in, and Kinski is occasionally too clever for its own good, such as when it drops hunks of buzz-killing skronk into the mellow, ambient "The Snowy Parts Of Scandinavia." **[Sub Pop, www.subpop.com]**

—Bill Meyer

FRANK LENZ
CONQUEST SLAUGHTER

HEADPHONES
HEADPHONES

Something should become apparent to Frank Lenz after back-to-back listens to his second solo album and the debut by Headphones (the synthesizer vehicle of Pedro The Lion's David Bazan and Tim Walsh, for which Lenz plays drums): It would be wise to remain behind the kit. The songs on *Conquest Slaughter*—which might as well be called *Conquest Slaughter Neil Young's Catalog*—are mostly mediocre rehashes of the aforementioned rocker-in-the-free-world's early work. Whether it's a matter of adulation or merely biology, the similarity between the pair's voices is enough to trigger an auditory double-take until the subpar songcraft clears up any confusion. This isn't to say the album doesn't have its moments. At the end of the title track, Lenz does his best Wilco impression, segueing from gentle folk to an engaging, cacophonous conclusion. While *Conquest Slaughter*'s hypnotic finale is a successful combination of melody and dissonance, it falls short of redeeming an otherwise lackluster effort.

Lenz's talents are much better utilized on *Headphones*, as he provides a subtly complex rhythmic foundation for Bazan's songs. Inspired by the Flaming Lips' "A Spoonful Weights A Ton," Bazan and Walsh have forgone guitars in favor of simple synth lines intertwining, to borrow a phrase from Nigel Tufnel. But Pedro The Lion fans will probably be delighted by the album. Bazan's ability to write compelling, catchy tunes remains intact—sharper than on Pedro's last album, *Achilles Heel*, in fact. Lyrically, Bazan touches upon familiar themes of faith, faithfulness and mortality with varying degrees of success. On "Shit Talker," Bazan descends into puerile mudslinging: "You talk shit about me to them ... I talk shit about you, too." But on "Major Cities," he offers a ballsy, poignant criticism of American foreign policy: "So just sit back and wait for the attacks ... Bullies ought to get what's coming." It's moments like this—Bazan infusing his singer/songwriter sensibility into a genre not typically known for its lyrical depth—that make *Headphones* so worthwhile. **[Velvet Blue, www.velvetbluemusic.com; Suicide Squeeze, www.suicidesqueeze.net]**

—Will Spitz

LUCERO
NOBODY'S DARLING

Lucero's Ben Nichols possesses a great, gargling, whiskey-soaked voice. It's a weary snarl, a raspy slur, a boozy moan. On its fourth full-length, Memphis' Lucero sets aside its twangy country sound in favor of full-blown Southern rock, and Nichols spits his words as if he's Shane MacGowan fueled by Jack Daniel's instead of John Power's. Produced by local hero Jim Dickinson with the same anthemic flair he brought to the Replacements' *Pleased To Meet Me*, *Nobody's Darling* is a relentless, rousing rock album that barely pauses to catch its breath. Like the Drive-By Truckers, Nichols and guitarist Brian Venable know how to honor the tradition of Lynyrd Skynyrd without succumbing to its clichés, and a lot of that comes from keeping the velocity and volume of their twin-guitar attack level just before it careens into chaos. These are top-down, open-road, driving songs: "Watch It Burn" chugs joyfully, "Bikeriders" (a tale of outlaw romance akin to Robert Earl Keene's "The Road Goes On Forever") hurtles recklessly, and "California" thrashes angrily. The tempo does occasionally slow down, as on the acoustic "The War." But at the heart of *Nobody's Darling* is the powerful, enduring, inviolable Southern-rock tradition. **[Liberty & Lament/East West, www.lucerofamily.net]**

—Steve Klinge

INTRODUCING THE BAND » AKRON/FAMILY • AKRON/FAMILY

Akron/Family is psych/folk, the first part of that descriptor being like when you'd offer your sibling a lick of your ice-cream cone, only to pull it away at the last second yelling, "Psych!" Because the closer you get to these campfire songs, the more you realize it's a fake-out. The group has the trembling acoustics and the warbly, high-pitched suffocating-miner vocals, but the structure is cockeyed and the cadence is off. Because they're young and have beards and live in Brooklyn, it's tempting to sew up the Family members in the same rucksack that contains Devendra Banhart and Joanna Newsom. But listen close and it's clear that the band members are not mystics but experimentalists at heart. Akron/Family was Michael Gira's backing band on the last Angels Of Light record, and the two outfits share a fondness for obtuse, open-ended songs. The banjo that opens "Running, Returning" may be straight from an Alabama front porch, but it's set against convulsing electronic percussion and is kicked aside at the song's halfway point as the whole piece tumbles forward into lurching post-rock. The band executes these sorts of hairpin turns throughout the record, peppering black-sky country lullabies with digital constellations. Akron/Family is John Brown's body, the ghost of Tom Joad and the art-school spirit of Andy Warhol crammed into one ornate, mossy mausoleum. **[Young God, www.younggodrecords.com]**

—J. Edward Keyes

STEPHEN MALKMUS • FACE THE TRUTH

Surely it's a mortality-awareness milepost to wake up one day only to find one of your generational icons has become a mortgage-paying, middle-aged dude just like you. I wish my dad was still around so I could ask him how he got his head around *Blood On The Tracks* (the first time it was obvious that the vicissitudes of life were fucking with the Jokerman and that he was vulnerable to attack), because that's what it feels like to confront *Face The Truth*. In some ways, Stephen Malkmus' third solo album since leaving Pavement is a return to his youthful inscrutability. "Pencil Rot" may or may not concern the darker side of sexual desire (with Malkmus lecturing his better self that the song's devil persona, Leather McWhip, "must be stopped"). But that still doesn't explain the eight-minute sprawl of "No More Shoes"—complete with a Rush-grade, trigonometric guitar solo—or the punk-cum-laude of "Baby C'mon," with Malkmus exhorting his slacker peers at the top of his vocal range, "So you say that you're too old to yell, but too young for hell?" Ultimately, *Face The Truth* is unmasked as a grower in the *Wowee Zowee* vein, too stylistically diverse, willfully weird and lyrically cryptic to be anything more than an acquired taste but too damned true to be anything less than another stone in the pathway to Malkmus' designation as his generation's catalog artist.

MAGNET phoned Malkmus, who recently became a father, in between bouts of child care at his home in Portland, Ore.

***Face The Truth* bears almost no imprint whatsoever from the birth of your daughter. If anything, it sounds like a smart-assy, mid-period Pavement album.**

I started it before we were going to have a kid, or knew for sure that was happening. I was running with the music, but lyrically, it's not about babies or anything.

Leather McWhip is pretty much the opposite of what you'd expect from a "gift of life" song.

Yeah, that's true. [*Laughs*] Primarily, I was doing the music here alone in the basement, anyway, with the drummer (John Moen). He helped with the engineering and plays on almost every song.

You once told me, "Pavement was less a democracy than it might have appeared." And I hear you describing the process of creating music and lyrics largely by yourself in your basement, and the connection between this and *Wowee Zowee* seems rather complete.

Yeah, I can see that. Sometimes, on four or five of the songs, Joanna Bolme (a member of the Jicks) plays bass, but the other ones I did all the music to. I don't know if it's me reflecting back or, like you say, working in the basement. Some of the Pavement stuff was done that way; if no one else was around but the drummer, I'd just do everything myself.

You read stories about when the Stones were making records in Keith's basement and maybe Mick would forget to show up for a day, and all of a sudden half the record's done.

That happens! With the Beatles, too. That's it, really, the big three: Beatles, Pavement and the Stones. **[Matador, www.matadorrecords.com]**

—Corey duBrowa

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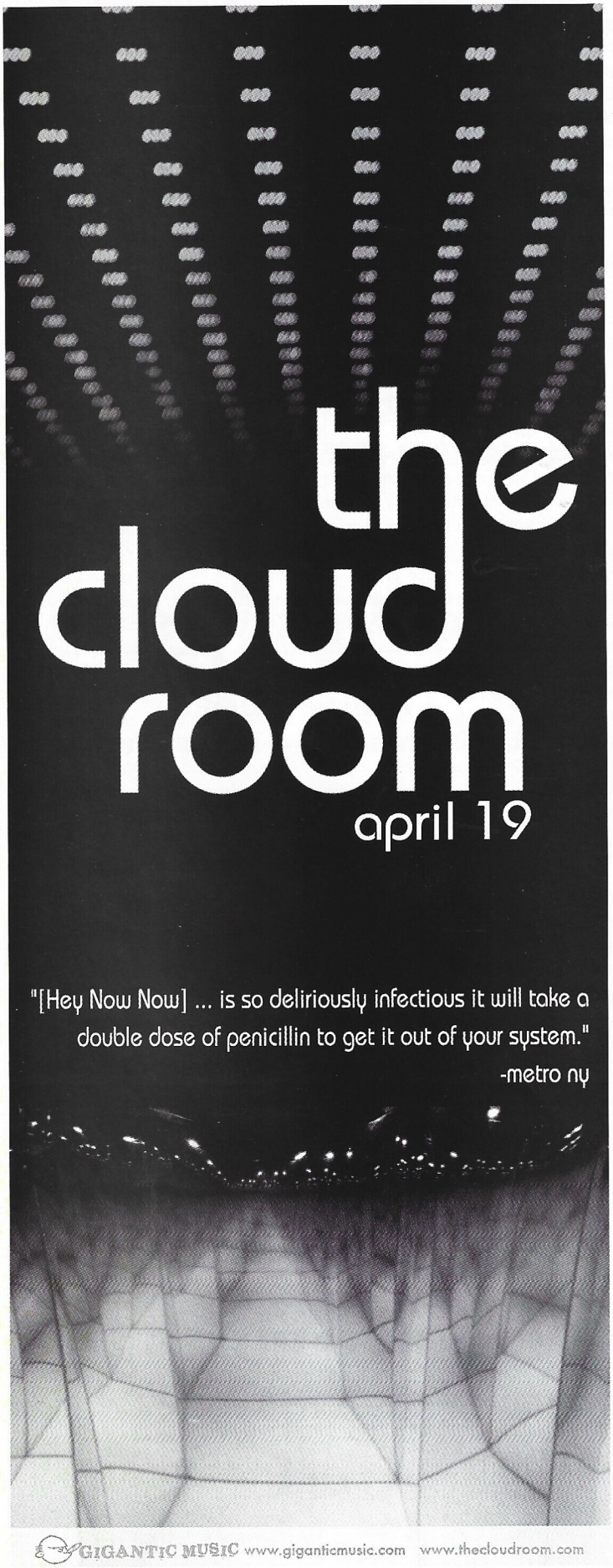
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MAJOR STARS
4

There are, perhaps, a couple of things keeping Wayne Rogers, whose guitar solos soar and float like red-tailed hawks over every Major Stars release, from being a guitar god. First of all, he isn't of the generation (late '60s/early '70s) that spawned such would-be deities. Also, Rogers and guitar-slinging partner Kate Biggar—whether in Major Stars or a half dozen other bands they've fronted—seem to exist in a timeless space where guitar rock is never bloated or stupid, where there's no room for stardom. As a result, listening to anything Major Stars has done is refreshing; there's a sense that whatever this rock stuff is, they got it right. *4* doesn't necessarily expand the formula laid down so mightily on their previous three LPs, but somehow, it's their best. The recording benefits from a bit more oomph in the fidelity department, giving Biggar's carpets of feedback needed attention. Two of the four tunes stretch to nearly 15 minutes and don't even bother with vocals, something Major Stars might be better off without, anyhow. Short opener "How To Be" pushes its few lyrics out of the way quickly, giving up space for shards of wah-wah-guitar histrionics. "Phantom #1" begins in a dreamy, feedback-enclosed landscape before giving way to a harmony-drenched riff that's simply perfect. Considering how spot-on *4* is, it's strange how Rogers and Biggar released it two years after it was recorded. Perhaps they weren't sure whether they wanted anyone to know how idyllic brain-frying psych can be. **[Twisted Village, www.twistedvillage.com]**

—Bruce Miller

MOMUS
OTTO SPOOKY

Without getting too sentimental, I miss Nick Currie: the melancholy Scot focused on crises of the heart, the conscience, the libido and, often, all three at once. Sung in a curious baritone croon, Currie's licentious lyrics, drenched in drool and cum, found their match in his mix of lurid music on 1988's *Tender Pervert*. While Currie's flitting interests—wizened folk, Francotronics and Japanese girly pop, to name a few—may seem like the work of a dabbler, he was a damn good one on 2001's *faux*-Appalachian *Folktronic*. Currie used to make these sorts of albums once or twice a year. He broke that chain a couple years back (his last one, the rarely found *Oskar Tennis Champion*, came out quietly in 2003), and you can only hope *Otto Spooky* is part of yet another cycle. Like *Oskar*, *Otto* luxuriates in tiny, clicking blip-beats with a sense of synth orchestration. It runs from the Oriental élan of "Corkscrew King" and the Parisian gypsy jive of "Klaxon" to the misty-mountain moorishness of "Life Of The Fields" and the Tin Pan Alley avarice of "Your Fat Friend" with expert silliness. But Currie is at his most devilishly clever as a fanciful

MICE PARADE
BEM-VINDA VONTADE

You'd be forgiven for expecting some exceedingly inventive song arrangements from a musician whose moniker was fashioned by the creative relocation of the letters in his name. Adam Pierce, anagrammatically known as Mice Parade, doesn't disappoint. His sixth release sparkles with glittering innovations: thickets of layered, thorny guitars and jazzy rhythms that simmer and pop like corn in a hot pan. Pierce's polyrhythmic percussion is still the star of this show; the sometime Múm drummer obeys time signatures the way commuters obey interstate speed limits. But keeping with Mice Parade's ongoing trend, the foreign-sounding, freeform melodies on *Bem-Vinda Vontade* hold serve with its showier rhythms, often resembling *TNT*-era Tortoise after a venue change from Chicago to coastal Spain. As on past releases, the general tone here is measured melancholia, given to fits of crescendo and diminuendo. At his best, on the polished "Nights Wave" and "Ground As Cold As Common," Pierce controls the amplitude with a conductor's wand, tugging at the heartstrings with each momentous swell and quelling fall. When he does flatten out, coming out from behind his kit to weave a taut tapestry of intertwined acoustics on "Steady As She Goes," Pierce spins his best song yet: a slow-moving storm cloud that's as lovely and ominous a creation as anything out of Calexico's bag of flamenco-informed, six-string tricks. **[Bubble Core, www.bubblecore.com]**

—Noah Bonaparte Pais

First Exposure

DE NOVO DAHL
CATS AND KITTENS

This Nashville collective's double-album debut is the musical equivalent of fraternal twins. The first disc, *Cats*, is full of strange, bouncy pop tunes, as carefree and synth-happy as the Shins on some Supergrass. *Kittens* is the funkier twin born from *Cats*' 16 songs, which the band remixed and reimagined for an electronic, dance-friendly second helping. At least a fragment of each song from *Cats* makes it on to *Kittens*, and the effect is both clever and adventurous. **[Theory 8, www.denovodahl.com]**

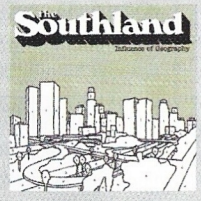
DEVICS
DISTANT RADIO

The duo of singer Sara Lov and multi-instrumentalist/singer Dustin O'Halloran escaped from L.A. and into the Italian countryside to record the five-song *Distant Radio*. What transpires sounds like a summit meeting of mood-rock all-stars under the Tuscan sun: Lov trills a Radiohead-like lullaby for "Just One Breath," and O'Halloran is a dead ringer for Smog's Bill Callahan on "Song For A Sleeping Girl." With additional hints of Cat Power, Lambchop and the Tindersticks, this *Radio* transmits impeccable taste. **[Leftwing, www.devics.com]**

SLEEPOVER DISASTER
LOUD IS THE NEW QUIET

This Fresno, Calif., band has taken on the Kings Of Convenience in a battle of volume and album titles. Where the Kings' *Quiet Is The New Loud* is clear and delicate, the Sleepover Disaster's sophomore full-length is muffled and harsh. Opening track "Comet" mentions both electricity and being in a trance, setting the stage for the 40 minutes' worth of dreamy-yet-intense shoegazer pop that follow. Rightfully, it should be loud. **[Sleepover Disaster, www.thesleepoverdisaster.com]**

SOUTHLAND
INFLUENCE OF GEOGRAPHY



This isn't your stereotypical Los Angeles metal or pop/punk outfit. Among the Southland's apparent geographical influences are Britain (Coldplay, the Smiths and '80s synth pop) and the Caribbean (reggae and island-flavored jam bands). Just to throw you off the scent, the quintet submits a cover of the Flamingos' "I Only Have Eyes For You," its fresh-yet-familiar, lush-yet-luminous arrangement breathing new life into the '60s chestnut. Hard to pin down? Possibly. Chameleon-like? Definitely. **[Ruffworld, www.ruffworld.com]**

THROUGH THE SPARKS
COIN TOSS

When a band's debut begins with the lines, "At the lonesome Chinese lunch buffet/Some kyoto tunes in a minor key," you know you're in for some well-considered, pent-up misery. This Birmingham, Ala., folk/pop quintet runs on the fumes of Jody Nelson's hangdog vocals and is detailed by vintage organs and pedal-steel guitar. "Home Lobotomy" is positively eels-like, a sad song with the perfect amount of grim humor. **[Skybucket, www.skybucket.com]**

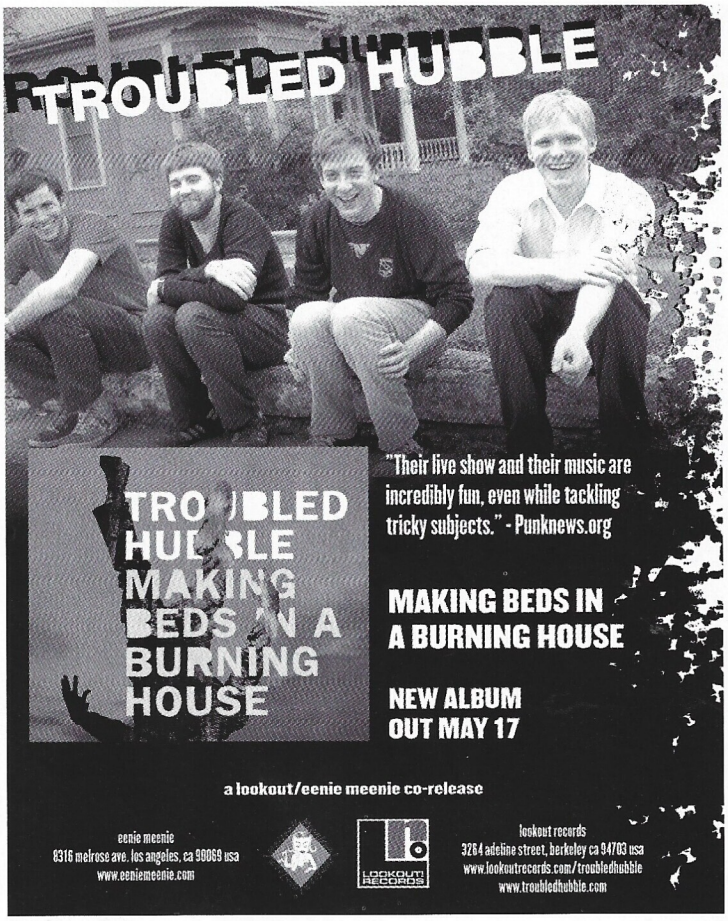
URDOG
EYELID OF MOON

This Providence, R.I., power trio evokes Oneida jamming with Amon Düül II for a production of *Hair*. Whereas the proggy psychedelia of last year's *Garden Of Bones* showed promise before losing a bit of its acid-drenched steam, *Eyelid Of Moon* locks into a sustained dollop of Dave Lifriri's forked guitar, Erin Rosenthal's mathy drums and Jeff Knoch's Farfisa, toy piano and harmonium. Urdog best taps Elysium when hunkering down wordlessly, as on the serpentine 13-minute title track. **[Secret Eye, www.secreteye.org]**

BAND TO WATCH »

BLACK MOSES
ROYAL STINK

This British trio went looking for the crossroads and found it: at the corner of Seattle and Detroit. (If stealing an Isaac Hayes album title for your name ain't a deal with the devil, well ...) Equal parts Mudhoney and MC5, with some Blues Explosion 'tude thrown in, Black Moses—vocalist/guitarist Jim Jones (shamanic former frontman for Thee Hypnotics), hyperactive bassist Graeme Flynn (Penthouse) and Moon-esque drummer David Axford (Original Sinners, Morgans)—struts and spews like nobody's business throughout its second full-length. *Royal Stink* indeed: These dirty-ass tunes have a distinctively regal swagger. Black Moses' appearance at this year's South By Southwest festival was enough to convince MAGNET. The rock revolution is here, right now. **[Rootbag, www.blackmoses.co.uk]**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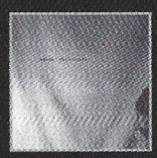

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"An almost textbook example of jangly-pop perfection. . . . Summer afternoons remembered in winter, transient loves recollected in solitude, fragile melodies etched into hazy sounds — they're all here in this oblique and lovely record." —*SPLENDID*

"Like the finest red wine . . . it leaves an insatiable taste for more."
—*DELUSIONS OF ADEQUACY*

interpreter of skewered medievalism. Hearing that rich burnished voice wrap itself around Gaelic runes, harvest moons and "Shinto dogs at the phallic symbol" is one of life's great pleasures. The thrill is heightened when Currie curdles his own phony ancient language to take on sexual surrealism, rape and other forms of pillaging. Yo ho. **[American Patchwork/Darla, www.darla.com]**

—*A.D. Amorosi*

MOUNTAIN GOATS
THE SUNSET TREE

Fans of the Mountain Goats have long suspected that frontman John Darnielle's fictional tales of broken dreams and love smashed to bits come from the depths of a very dark place. But starting with last year's autobiographical *We Shall All Be Healed*, Darnielle has donned a miner's hat for the purpose of spelunking those nasty crevices. With *The Sunset Tree*, a sonically modest affair compared to lush recent offerings, Darnielle turns his acoustic guitar toward his relationship with his abusive, recently deceased stepfather. On opener "You Or Your Memory," Darnielle takes us, barefoot on the hot asphalt, to the corner store to pick up St. Joseph baby aspirin and Bartles & Jaymes wine coolers. "Lord, if I make it through tonight," he sings, "then I will mend my wings." With its recurring themes of hardship and endurance, *The Sunset Tree* can be bleak, but it's also redemptive. Darnielle spells out the viciousness of familial travails in animalistic terms: There's "Up The Wolves," "Lion's Teeth," "Magpie" and "Hast Thou Considered The Tetrapod" ("One of these days, I'm gonna wriggle up on dry land"). Amid the strife, music is cited as, if not a means of resistance, then a means of escape. On "Tetrapod," Darnielle sings, "Hoping you don't break my stereo/Because it's the one thing that I couldn't live without," while on "Dance Music," a young Darnielle retreats to his room and his record player when his parents erupt. On an LP rife with personal agony and catharsis, Darnielle turns such material into a work of universal appeal. **[4AD, www.4ad.com]**

—*Brian Howard*

MARISSA NADLER
THE SAGA OF MAYFLOWER MAY

On first listen, Marissa Nadler evokes Hope Sandoval, but what separates the Brooklyn folkie from the Mazzy Star chanteuse is Nadler's ability to stave off detachment, infusing warmth into her dark ballads and sylvan shanties. (That, and she handles her own guitar, ukulele, five-string banjo, organ, etc.) On her lovely debut, last year's *Ballads Of Living And Dying*, Nadler avoids a pretentious chill even when retooling Edgar Allen Poe's "Annabelle Lee" or submerging herself in the drowning death of Virginia Woolf. With *The Saga Of Mayflower May*, the literary references aren't as obvious (the songs follow her alter ego, Mayflower May, through various quests), but Nadler's erudite melancholy and knack for wraith-like melody is even more distinctive. (Think of Neko Case swathed in black.) Despite her dusky aesthetic, she fills the songs with color: The almost upbeat strumming of "Yellow Lights" finds the protagonist "drinking rubies in the rain," while the narrator issues the warning, "Oh, Mary, don't you die/'Cause of the color of her eyes." Ominous closer "Horses And Their Kin," complete with ghostly choir, talks of silver trees and a yellow moon amid a raging fire. There's freak folk or new-weird whatever, and then there's Nadler's gothic-tinged folklore and crystalline choruses, which could've been penned centuries ago by Poe's lost maidens in crumbling mansions. Or, judging from Nadler's cover photo, perhaps Ophelia is a better fit. **[Eclipse, www.eclipse-records.com]**

—*Brandon Stosuy*

NEED NEW BODY
WHERE'S BLACK BEN?

Five years ago, Need New Body's first album married the cut-and-paste aesthetic of 1973's hippie/experimental *The Faust Tapes* with the protean goofs of the Sun City Girls' entire catalog. Two LPs and an All Tomorrow's Parties festival appearance later, *Where's Black Ben?* testifies to the Philadelphia group's ceaseless fidgeting. In fact, if there's anything that identifies Need New Body as a single entity, it's the band's ability to come off as white rap of the vilest sort, European avant-garde improvisers, a forgotten Cambodian street group and those kids next door who you wish would either play some good music or move, all in 10 minutes time. Though *Where's Black Ben?* is more obnoxious and less charming than its predecessors, things get interesting if you stick around long enough. After starting off with a few bratty minutes of pale-faced hip hop, some banjo-driven silliness and what sounds like an annoying stab at Ugandan Royal Court vocal music, Need New Body brings in Marshall Allen and Tyrone Hill from Sun Ra's Arkestra and gets just serious enough to be beautiful for two tracks. By "Badoosh + Seagull War = Die," the Arkestra members have disappeared, leaving the band soaring on a magic carpet of electric fuzz, climaxing in

sustained screams over drones that nearly wash away the memory of how repellently this album started out. At least the rest of *Where's Black Ben?*—whether conjuring images of Kazakhstan, possessed church organists or Deerhoof—remains unpredictable. **[5 Rue Christine, www.5rc.com]**

—Bruce Miller

STINA NORDENSTAM
THE WORLD IS SAVED

Only filmmakers Mike Leigh and Ken Loach present a bleaker and more miserable worldview than that of Stina Nordenstam's sixth record. Like those British auteurs, the reclusive Swedish singer/songwriter revels in moments when life threatens to collapse, leaving a pile of emotional rubble: "This is a downcast position/At least it is real," she sings on "Parliament Square," her thin, vulnerable voice (think a slightly less infantile version of '80s pastoral-pop singer Virginia Astley or the Cranes' Alison Shaw) sounding as dreary as a row of government-built cinderblock houses. Nordenstam enlists an eclectic range of instruments as her backing band on *The Word Is Saved*, and at times it sounds as if she's accidentally wandered into a jazz orchestra's practice session. Piano forms the bass line on "Get On With Your Life," and smooth-jazz saxophone reclines luxuriantly in the center of "Parliament Square." Several songs, including the title track and the lovely "I'm Staring Out The World," are based on the scraping and plunking of string quartets. Thankfully, these musical accompaniments temper the heartbreak and pain at the center of *The World*. It's almost as if Nordenstam is thumbing her nose at the tear-streaked face sulking in front of the camera. **[V2, www.v2music.com]**

—Tizzy Asher

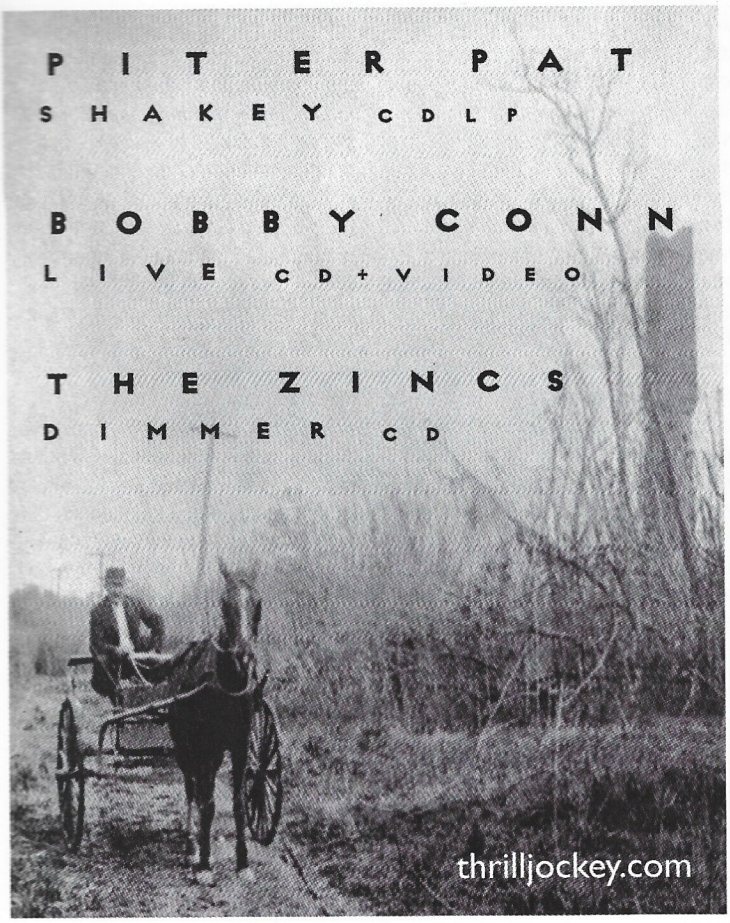
OCS
3 & 4

OCS is the latest adventure from ex-Coachwhips singer/guitarist John Dwyer, but if you're expecting a full-bore, distortion-ravaged thrashing, forget it. OCS (Orinoka Crash Suite) is subtle and plaintive folk/rock for would-be lovers and lonely, misunderstood people, not moshpit bullies and sexual predators. If the Coachwhips' abrasive, horn-dog ferocity comes off as a trio of walking erections then OCS is a geeky duo of eunuch masturbators carefully revealing bottled-up emotions, tentative to explore their own simmering libido. *3 & 4*, a 28-track, double-disc set of mainly muffled, minimalist songwriting, blissfully reincarnates the forgotten souls of Delta bluesmen, the Folk Implosion and Syd Barrett. Dwyer employs a childlike vocal timbre that imagines Alvin from the Chipmunks channeling the spirit of a sober, Theremin-playful Jon Spencer. With OCS, Dwyer is focused on under-amplified guitar strumming and sweetly haunting, tongue-in-cheek lyrics linked by an umbilical cord of unobtrusive drumming from sidekick Patrick Mullins. Be warned, though: Only the most ardent fan will have the patience to digest this entire set without nodding off. The downtrodden, field-quality recordings romanticizing love and death materialize like a snail crawling across a razor-sharp sling blade: painfully slow and hard to ignore. **[Narnack, www.narnackrecords.com]**

—Ron Bally

ONEIDA
THE WEDDING

It's hard to tell exactly where Oneida is headed. Perhaps it's a mystical ceremony in some moon-dappled grove where spiritually bereft Brooklynites look for something real and intangible. Or maybe it's the famed footlights of Budokan. Wherever the band is going, it's traveling with the determination of a fanatical pilgrim. There's an amazing consistency to Oneida's body of work, yet each release is distinctive enough to be tagged with a unique, reductive descriptor. 2000's *Come On Everybody Let's Rock* is the cock rocker. 2001's *Anthem Of The Moon* is sylvan psych. 2002's *Each One Teach One* is the double album. Last year's *Secret Wars* is the krautrock record. *The Wedding* will inevitably be known as the one with strings. Unlike the Ramones, these New York rockers didn't need a pistol-packing Phil Spector to compel them to class up their rock with a viola or two. Brian Coughlin was brought in to arrange strings for six of the 13 tracks, and his ensemble's contributions help to flesh out Oneida's occasionally repetitive minimalism. Lest you expect a *Hooked On Classics* for the New Beard America, "Lavender" delivers the leaner, patented Oneida sound: pulsing vintage organ, *motorik* drumming and humorous lyrics ("The old men love me as I braid my pubic hair"). The grass-crumbs-in-the-gatefold riffage of "Did I Die" is one of the best examples of Oneida's ballsy, populist side and is the kind of scorching rocker Neil Hagerty has been trying to write for years. *The Wedding* is Oneida's most cohesive



and beautiful record to date. It's a menacing, baroque/psych masterpiece that will reward the faithful who believe in the band's brilliantly fugged vision. **[Jagjaguwar, www.jagjaguwar.com]**

—David Dunlap Jr.

PAJO
PAJO

Goddamn, listening to this record makes for one spooky experience. Three tracks in, on hushed acoustic meditation "Ten More Days," I'm teleported back to the rainy Saturday on which I first put Elliott Smith's 1994 debut *Roman Candle* into my car's cassette deck; the sonic qualities and emotional impact are that precisely identical. Like Smith did with Heatmiser, David Pajo has previously made his reputation based on contributions to ensemble efforts (his spacious guitar work in Slint, stints as a member/guest of Zwan, Tortoise, For Carnation, Palace, Royal Trux and Stereolab). He also quietly went about the task of creating a stubbornly parallel career for himself with an instrumental identity (variously called Ariel M and Papa M) to which he finally lent a voice on 2001's *Papa M Sings*. *Pajo* is where the mystery ends or, at least, is made slightly more tangible. His first non-anonymous solo album neatly splits the difference between Smith's private four-track prayers for redemption ("Oh No No," "Icicles") and Will Oldham's jaggedly eccentric Americana ("Mary Of The Wild Moor," "War Is Dead"). Pajo may never fully reveal himself on record, but *Pajo* comes as close to capturing his mercurial talent and shifting identity as we're ever likely to hear. **[Drag City, www.dragcity.com]**

—Corey duBrowa

GRAHAM PARKER
SONGS OF NO CONSEQUENCE

Over time, anger grows boring. It's great to be an angry young man, but by the time you reach middle age, you need a new shtick. Sure, getting old sucks. Sure, evil sucks. So what? At his late-'70s peak, when his anger was raw and his band raucous, Graham Parker only ranted about things that mattered. Now, with the Figgs as his backup band, Parker is lashing out at fat housewives and Ben & Jerry's. Is that the best he can do? More than half of these cuts, including the closing "Did Everybody Just Get Old?" (on which he sings, "This song is just a filler"), really are inconsequential. The three that aren't ("Bad Chardonnay," "Chloroform" and "Ambivalent") are a thousand times better, with wordplay that's smarter than it is caustic, melodies that don't exceed the limitations of the Figgs' power pop and hooks that make the songs impossible to get out of your head. They're about real people, not some movie star in a fancy car, and Parker's anger is real, dipped in pain, self-righteousness and understanding. If he's not planning to retire, this is the direction he should follow. **[Bloodshot, www.bloodshotrecords.com]**

—Kenny Berkowitz

ARIEL PINK'S HAUNTED GRAFFITI
WORN COPY

Sometimes interference has the paradoxical effect of magnifying music's emotional impact. Daniel Johnston and Lou Barlow never sounded better than when heard through a blizzard of tape hiss. Only time—and recordings made under less duress—will show whether Ariel Pink can manifest his magic outside the lo-fi zone, but there's no denying the power conferred by the fucked-up audio quality of *Worn Copy* is integral to its warped charm. Pink is a twentysomething denizen of Los Angeles who manufactures ersatz '70s pop junk at home on an eight-track cassette. The result is so boomy and muffled, you'd swear you were hearing a TV with a coat-hanger antenna through the apartment wall with a pillow over your head. But if that were really the case, the pillow might not stay put. Pink's synth-basted apology ballads, floppy electro funk and peppy new-wave jams exert a creepy magnetism. Contradictory lyrical fragments drift out of the murk: "Every time we make plans, I think leather and lace," he croons, then a couple lines later, he laments, "Life in L.A. is so lonely." Pink saves the strangest song for last. "Folly Foibles/GOLD" is a sprawling suite that segues from an echo-drenched keyboard excursion into a woozy disco epic about aging, money and showbiz triumph. **[Paw Tracks, www.paw-tracks.com]**

—Bill Meyer

PONYS
CELEBRATION CASTLE

This second full-length of cracked and blistered guitar tantrums from the Ponys is definitely cause for celebration. The Chicago quartet is led by Jered Gummere (he of the Tom Verlaine-style vocal yips and hair-on-fire fretboard explorations), and its songs rest at the tipping point between melodic and atonal without seeming like middle-of-the-post-punk-road accords struck between dissenting intra-band camps. The Ponys don't have it down to a science—yet. Despite a witchy

Books

ALL YESTERDAY'S PARTIES: THE VELVET UNDERGROUND IN PRINT 1966-1970

CLINTON HEYLIN

This chronicles contemporary press reaction to the Velvets during their remarkable 1966-1971 existence. Rock archivist and biographer Heylin prefaces *All Yesterday's Parties* with an outstanding 25-page thesis: As the Velvets grew aesthetically, so did the attendant rock journalism, as if both camps prodded each other to greater heights. The book begins with baffled dissenters and ends with some first-rate insights by future critical stars Lenny Kaye, Ben Edmonds and Lester Bangs. Included is the best VU discography, bootlegs and all, ever published. **[Da Capo, www.dacapopress.com]**

—Michael Baker

HOW THE LEFT LOST TEEN SPIRIT

DANNY GOLDBERG

Like Rodney Bingenheimer, music-industry executive Goldberg has had run-ins with everyone from Hendrix to Hanson. (You might remember him as the guy who cusses out Nick Broomfield for crashing an ACLU bash in the film *Kurt & Courtney*.) This book, which is more memoir than manifesto, recounts that snafu and exhibits further combustibility: In a scene deserving of a Tipper Gore parental-advisory sticker, Goldberg and Al Gore drop f-bombs on each other. Elsewhere, Ronald Reagan quotes *Back To The Future* in a State of the Union address and the Allman Brothers' drummer disses rap. **[RDV, www.rdvbooks.com]**

—William Bowers

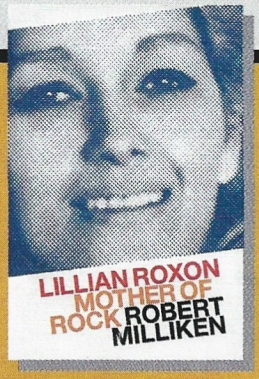
PIANO GIRL: LESSONS IN LIFE, MUSIC, AND THE PERFECT BLUE HAWAIIAN

ROBIN MELOY GOLDSBY

Apart from the schmaltzy lyrics interspersed throughout the main narrative, there's a curious lack of music in Goldsby's memoir. Instead, *Piano Girl* recounts her 30-plus-year career as a cocktail pianist by describing the quirks and foibles of the people who lean, figuratively and literally, on her grand piano. One flamboyant character dresses his poodle in fur and leather, another well-heeled patron stalks, then assaults her, and a bar manager becomes convinced that guests would prefer a piano-playing robot to a human. **[Backbeat, www.backbeatbooks.com]**

—Tizzy Asher

LILLIAN ROXON: MOTHER OF ROCK



ROBERT MILLIKEN

"Mother of rock" may be an overstatement, but Lillian Roxon was unquestionably the mother of rock journalism. 1969's *Lillian Roxon's Rock Encyclopedia* remains a landmark effort and the benchmark for all subsequent music-reference works. Hers was a life lived large, as Milliken painstakingly reconstructs through interviews and—in a positioning of Roxon as a literary figure, not merely a celebrity—by tapping the trove of personal correspondence she left behind following her 1973 death, at age 41, from asthma. A habitué of the early New York rock scene, she rubbed shoulders with everyone from the Byrds and Stones to Bowie and Iggy. Included are several Roxon essays—among them, a brilliant deconstruction of Creedence Clearwater Revival—plus selected entries from *Encyclopedia*. **[Thunder's Mouth Press, www.thundersmouth.com]**

—Fred Mills

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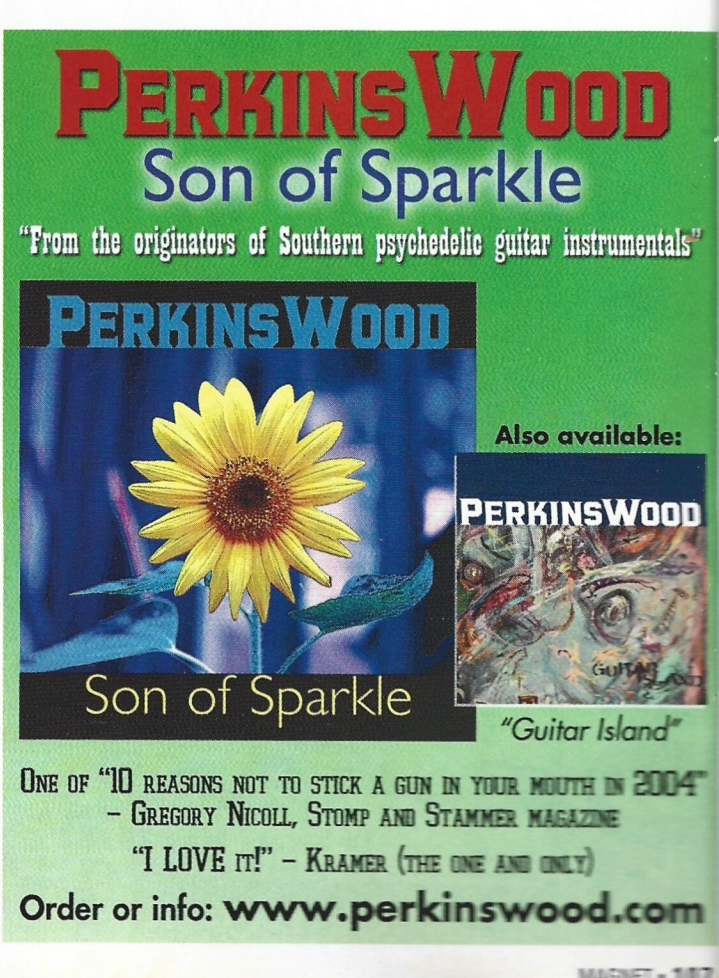
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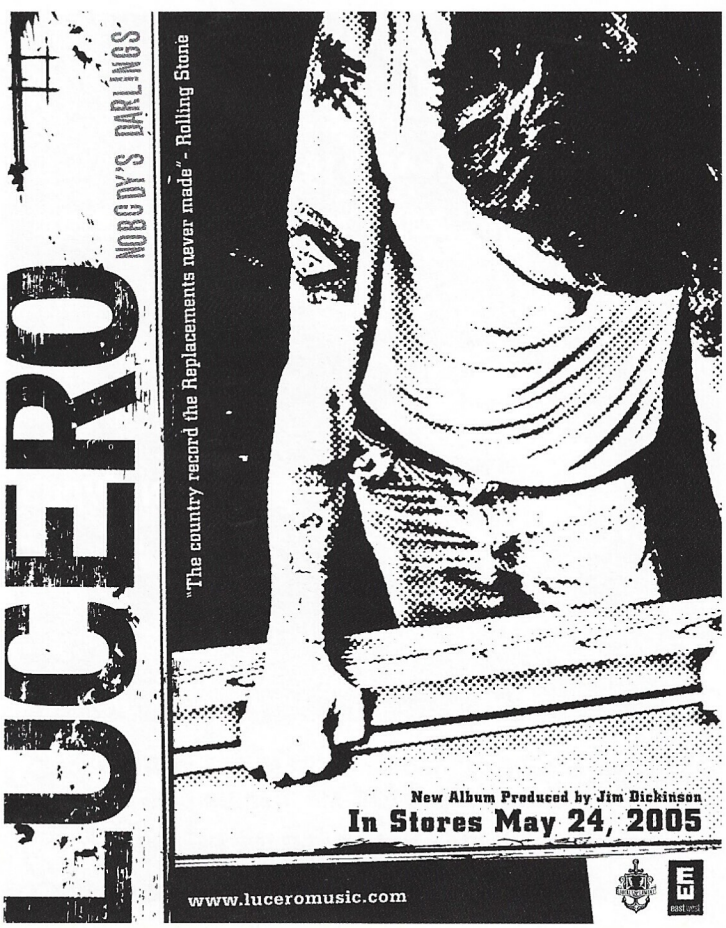
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intro that sounds like a stoner plucking out the melody to "Love Will Tear Us Apart" on one string, "We Shot The World" bleakly plods along with nowhere to go but in circles; closer "Ferocious" feels a bit like an afterthought. The remaining tracks are stellar examples of arty indie rock crafted with conviction instead of wanky subversion. Songs are distinctly grouped: The buoyant "Today" precedes the hopeful "I'm With You." Both are catchy and resonate with a sort of love-the-one-you're-with pragmatism. "Discoteca" and "Get Black" (where it's summer in the city and Gummere is ready to boil over) form a sleazy one-two punch, each introduced by a "Brown Sugar"-derived riff that caramelizes into teeth-rotting candy. Chase that pair with "She's Broken," a vocal showcase for bassist Melissa Elias, but beware the sugar-high comedown. **[In The Red, www.intheredrecords.com]**

—Patrick Berkery

RADAR BROS.
THE FALLEN LEAF PAGES

No band has taken its shady slowcore sound with the sort of breathy melancholy of the Radar Bros. From the enervated irritation found on its 1997 eponymous debut to the moonage-daydream direness of 1999's *The Singing Hatchet*, the band's flat-lined guitars and mumbled synths just seem exhausted, rolling from song to song with little demarcation or tempo change. Fraught with melodrama everywhere he turns, frontman Jim Putnam can barely keep his head up through the drudgeries of day-to-day existence. It's this slow-burned numbness that's made the California brothers so addictive. *The Fallen Leaf Pages* isn't louder or any more ferocious, though lyrically, on "Faces Of The Damned," Putnam seems rubbed the wrong way by his native L.A. But with the subtle ornamentation of warm-winded acoustics, terse piano and an occasional chord lifted from Brian Wilson's no-longer-lost *Smile*, there seems to be hope of something uplifted and hummable. Though sleepy, "To Remember," "The River Shade" and the poking, prodding "Papillon" nearly hoist themselves beyond somnambulant monotone. It's drowsy, but it's drowsy with one cup of coffee in it. **[Merge, www.mergerecords.com]**

—A.D. Amorosi

RAVEONETTES
PRETTY IN BLACK

The Raveonettes successfully bum-rushed the new-garage explosion by pitching themselves as the Nordic White Stripes. By going high-concept (brief, minimalist, fuzzed-out songs restricted to a single key) for 2002's *Whip It On* EP and 2003's *Chain Gang Of Love*, they also veered perilously close to novelty turf. Their solution? Go high-concept once again. A tattered travelogue across the times and tapestry of pop, *Pretty In Black* is a nonstop crush of sonic iconography: Lee Hazlewood (ballad "Seductress Of Bums"), Everly Brothers (the harmony-strewn "Here Comes Mary"), Phil Spector (echo-chamber orgy "Ode To L.A."; yes, those are the unmistakable pipes of Ronnie Spector arriving midsong). Speaking of guests, the Velvet Underground's Moe Tucker and Suicide's Martin Rev also turn up, although rather than imprint their cuts, they demur on the side of subtlety. In fact, Rev doesn't even appear on the most Suicide-like song here, an electro-drone cover of the Angels' "My Boyfriend's Back" (penned in 1963 by Richard Gottehrer, *Pretty In Black*'s producer). With that and other odd twists—dig the improbable marriage of Shangri-Las, Jesus And Mary Chain, Dick Dale, Blondie and Rolling Stones that is "Sleepwalking"—taking equal billing alongside the homages, *Pretty In Black* ultimately attains genuine staying power. The only novelty here is how fresh it all sounds even after multiple spins. **[Columbia, www.columbiarecords.com]**

—Fred Mills

MARC RIBOT
SPIRITUAL UNITY

Is it too late to declare 2005 the year of Albert Ayler? Last year brought Revenant Records' staggering Ayler boxed set, and the revived ESP-Disk label recently issued a platter of unreleased Ayler material. Now comes *Spiritual Unity*, avant-guitar wizard Marc Ribot's superb tribute to the spirit and music of the free-jazz giant. Ribot and jazz luminaries Henry Grimes (bass), Chad Taylor (percussion) and Roy Campbell, Jr. (horns) assay Ayler's diverse performance styles on five cuts, four of which ("Bells," "Saints," "Truth Is Marching In" and "Spirits") represent some of his most significant compositions. What's most startling about *Spiritual Unity*, particularly given Ribot's aggressively interpretive aesthetic, is the sheer note-perfect reverence with which the quartet approaches Ayler's melodic lines. Entire opening statements on *Spiritual Unity* could've been lifted directly from the master's own releases, which hardly constitutes criticism, considering Ayler's notoriously difficult music. Grimes (who played with Ayler) and Campbell (a sideman of Sun Ra and Rashied Ali) provide much of the project's authentic sound. Ribot and Taylor (a rising star in Chicago's contem-

AMY RAY • PROM

The dark-haired half of the Indigo Girls, Amy Ray also authors much of the folk/rock duo's darker, edgier material; she's Chrissie Hynde to Emily Salier's Judy Collins. Like 2001's solo *Stag*, *Prom* further reveals Ray's punk roots, and it's no accident that among its players are Donna Dresch and Jody Bleyle (from Team Dresch) and garage terrorists Nineteen Forty-Five. The title is no accident, either: *Prom* is an autobiographical journey as seen through the eyes of a girl who came of age in the South during the '70s and had to grapple with her lesbianism under the cruelly withering glare of high school. As images of pep rallies and drivers-education classes flit past, the ghosts of friends and acquaintances—old crushes, teenage runaways, victims of abuse, sexually confused gay bashers—also appear. The album's narrative tone is established with opening cut "Put It Out For Good," a Tom-Petty-meets-Clash anthem on which an "overachiever of the wrong persuasion" hangs out with fellow misfits ("punks, queers, freaks, smokers") yet senses there has to be a life beyond the limits imposed by parents, teachers and locale. "I got this spark, I got to feed it something," howls Ray, "or put it out for good." Impossible to resist, it's the defiant anthem of the summer.

Ray spoke from her home in Dahlonega, Ga., a rural town an hour north of Atlanta, about *Prom* and politics.

For a straight white male who grew up in a tiny textile town in the South during the early '70s, your new record brings back memories of being a teenage misfit. Change a few of the lyrics and "Put It Out For Good" could almost be my story.

I thought those images were universal. The Indigo Girls had played a show at this high school. Afterwards, we were hanging around outside and all the kids were smoking and being cool. I just looked and thought, "My god, nothing changes." I wanted to empower anybody now who's going through that. You can always take all that energy, all that stuff you have that's untapped, and just be a superpower. You know those scenes in *West Side Story* where the gangs are all itchy and everything? I felt like that the whole time I was there.

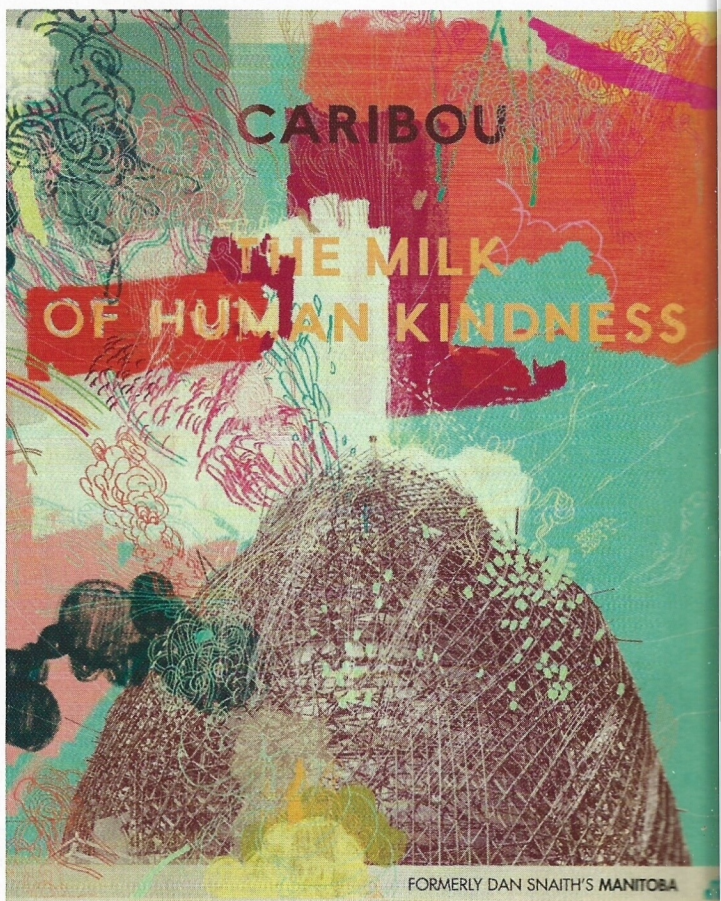
What is it about the South that makes the teenage experience an especially alien, terrifying endurance test?

What we went through in the South in the public schools—that sort of denial and violence about so many things—we didn't know what to call any of it, you know? We had no articulation. When I talk to kids now, they have references to sexuality and gender, and they talk about it. When I was in high school, I didn't even know what the word "gay" meant. Even though I was in love with this girl my senior year, I didn't have any concepts when it dawned that it was not supposed to happen.

Rufus Wainwright recently said that for the people who voted Bush back into office, the enemy today isn't terrorism but gays and women.

On some levels, definitely. We have *Will & Grace* and *Ellen* and these pop-culture ways of accepting gay people. It's like it's different to watch it on TV than to say it's OK for two people to marry. The disconnect is amazing. **[Daemon, www.daemonrecords.com]**

—Fred Mills



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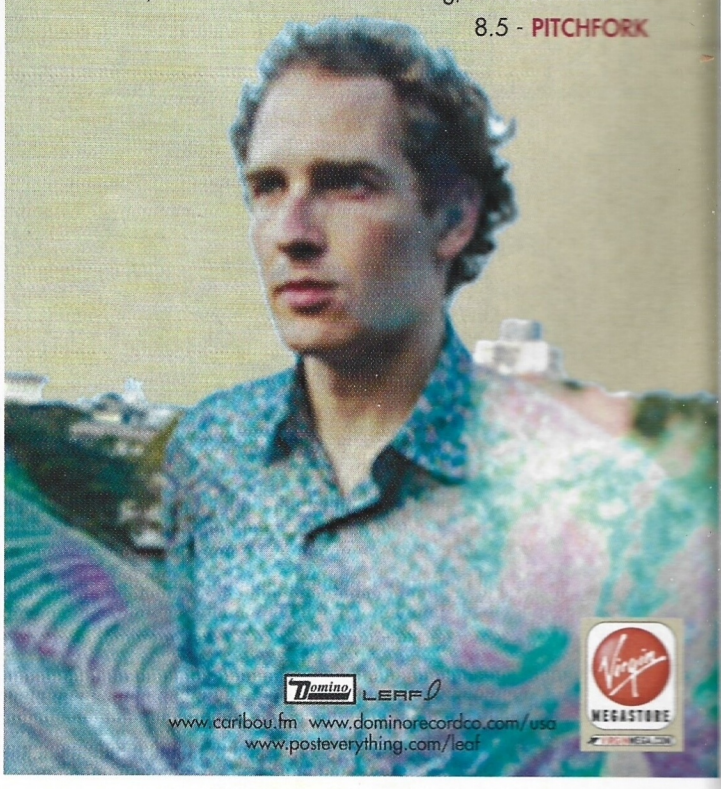

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Virgin MEGASTORE

porary free-jazz scene) are the young bucks here, but these performances are the work of musicians so attuned to each other that they might be a single set of hands working a single instrument. *Spiritual Unity* is one of those rare tribute albums recommendable to both the aficionado and the beginner. Simply remarkable. **[Pi, www.pirecordings.com]**

—Eric Waggoner

RÖYKSOPP
THE UNDERSTANDING

Because greed is good, Röyksopp is finished giving its hottest beats to other people. So far, the Norwegian duo's most inspired and celebratory work has come from remixing others. Even its take on Coldplay's formerly boring "Clocks" bounces harder and more infectiously than anything on Röyksopp's snoozy 2001 debut, *Melody A.M.*, which isn't so much a comedown as much as it is an all-around downer. Svein Berge and Torbjörn Brundtland's second album is a smack of adrenaline, a sniff of coke and '80s nostalgia and the digital embodiment of Eurotrash. *The Understanding* is full of house music for people with tans, and Röyksopp's shift to the fun side is exactly what its music needed. The duo traipses through all kinds of post-Kraftwerk, European electronic sounds, doing Erasure better than Erasure (at least at this point) on the bitchy "Beautiful Day Without You," hanging out at the disco with drum fills that actually say "boom!" during "Follow My Ruin" and wrapping its whispered vocals around each other on hyper ballad "Circuit Breaker." "Alpha Male," the longest and thickest track, sounds like the Notwist rocking Ibiza, which is to say cautiously, if at all. But flaws and all, this new attitude—a hair-slicked-back, creepy-smile, air-kissing disposition—is about a thousand times more entertaining than Röyksopp's previous, Air-kissing one. **[Astralwerks, www.astralwerks.com]**

—Rich Juzwiak

RUSSIAN FUTURISTS
OUR THICKNESS

After taking his band around the world to perform in England, Spain and, uh, Tallahassee, Fla., Matthew Adam Hart has safely returned to his Toronto bedroom to record a third album as the Russian Futurists. Past comparisons to the Flaming Lips (for quirky, cerebral drama) and Magnetic Fields (for whiny, wordy confessionals) are still well-placed, but no matter how much he's grown, Hart remains smaller and more insular than either of those acts. He's taken refuge in the world of '80s econo pop, polishing these tunes until they shine, the melodies candy-coated and the words etched in blood. Some of it's clever ("When we died in our sleep, no one had time to weep"), some of it's painful ("It's over and done with, there's some shit I hate, and I fear I've become it"), but ultimately, it's too narrow. There's a universe of self-pity on these 10 songs, all of them sharp, smart and very stylish. "Paul Simon" (with its punchy horn part) and "2 Dots On A Map" (with its pseudo-orchestral heartbreak) are brilliant. But taken in one sitting, *Our Thickness* is just wearying, barely raising its head above the misery and sorely in need of a little fresh air. **[Upper Class, www.upperclass.to]**

—Kenny Berkowitz

SMOG
A RIVER AIN'T TOO MUCH TO LOVE

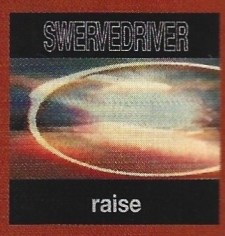
Bill Callahan has dropped the parentheses from his stage name, leaving us nerds to puzzle over what that could mean. Has he decided to become more human? Is that why he moved to Texas and made this patchily pretty album full of rural imagery in Willie Nelson's studio? Don't be fooled by the inclusion of the traditional "In The Pines"; Callahan is still primarily concerned with "being hard to get to know," as a woman in a bar is told during "I'm New Here." At its best, *A River Ain't Too Much To Love*'s speak-singing persona is hung up on some memories of flirting with the profane: Separate songs recall the time Callahan screamed "fuck all y'all" down a well, the time he found "skin mags in the bramble" and the times he took baths with his sister. Another track sums up what he's doing as "getting off on the pornography of my past." But a few verses later, he longs to transcend the vast baseness, to cease to wonder idly, "Did that rapper rape her?" Never sounding like he's in search of an audience, Callahan is so confident about his unlikeability that he almost pulls off the prairie-loner aura. Too much of *A River*, though, doesn't give you enough music to love it. The chords, plucking, voice and drums are cruelly static, making hard slogs out of the longer tunes. Gather 'round the fire, everybody, so this feller can talk to himself about himself, often uninterestingly. **[Drag City, www.dragcity.com]**

—William Bowers

SPARROW
THE EARLY YEARS

Jason Zumpano's name gives him both a leg up and a tough bar to clear. The Canadian band that bore his surname released two excellent albums for Sub Pop in the mid-'90s, and it probably would've disappeared into obscurity if Zumpano singer Carl Newman hadn't launched the New Pornographers. With Sparrow, Zumpano (the guy) seems comfortable twirling in his own section of Popland, chugging along earnestly and tunefully but never attempting the grandiosity of his ex-bandmate. That's fine: *The Early Years* shares sonic space with Robert Schneider's various incarnations (Apples In Stereo, Marbles, et al), winking at psychedelia but always keeping its feet in unassuming, song-first shoes. Unfortunately, those shoes sometimes beat a pedestrian

CLASSIC ALTERNATIVE » SWERVEDRIVER • RAISE



In the fall of 1991, a British band bearing the staggeringly apt moniker Swervedriver scorched through the American heartland. Yours truly witnessed the quartet—guitarists Adam Franklin and Jimmy Hartridge, bassist Adi Vynes and drummer Graham Bonner—blast hot sheets of solar wind through a punk club's patrons in the most bone-rattling display since early-'70s Black Sabbath. Debut album *Raise* had just been released by A&M, although the group's U.K. pedigree as part of the Creation Records stable held greater significance; in *Raise*'s psychedelic vortex of overdriven guitars, jackhammer drums and woozy, what-drug-am-I-on? vocals, Swervedriver was every bit the equal of labelmates My Bloody Valentine and Ride. The song titles telegraph Swervedriver's volume-dealing intentions: "Sandblasted," "Pile-Up," "Rave Down." Only dreamy album closer "Lead Me Where You Dare..." is overtly shoegazey. "Son Of Mustang Ford" is an anthemic assault that arc-welds together "Search And Destroy," "My Generation," Spacemen 3's "Revolution" and Dinosaur Jr's "Yeah We Know." In short, it's a rock fetishist's dream. Swervedriver couldn't sustain that level of intensity, however. Bonner freaked out and split during the American tour, and Vynes left the following year. For sheer visceral wallop and brain-uncorking sizzle, *Raise* remains one of the most kick-out-the-jams Brit-rock releases ever. It's long out of print, but key tracks can be found on *Juggernaut Rides—89-98*, a recent Swervedriver anthology. **[Creation/A&M]**

—Fred Mills

path. Zumpano's limited vocal range makes "This Is How It's Done" and "I'm Just Not There" fairly interchangeable. But a couple of songs on this short, nine-song album (particularly the ultra-catchy "So Far From Me") prevent it from disappearing completely into either the shadow of former-band associations or its own disposable sweetness. **[Absolutely Kosher, www.absolutelykosher.com]**

—Josh Modell

SPOON
GIMME FICTION

Gimme Fiction is a tale of two sides. Side A (for "admirable") is an effortless encapsulation of what makes Spoon so swell. The music's percussive pulse builds to choruses so pointed they could penetrate asphalt. As always, Britt Daniel's lyrics tease more than they tell ("My mathematical mind can see the breaks/So I'm gonna stop ridin' the brakes"), throttled into coherence by vocals as soulful as they are damaged beyond repair. When Daniel is on, he's an underhanded genius with a hook. "The Beast And Dragon, Adored" and "The Two Sides Of Monsieur Valentine" open the LP with the sort of Anglo-pop touches that help make 2001's *Girls Can Tell* the band's best album. "I Turn My Camera On" finds Daniel toying with a Prince-like falsetto, and the playful result is more "Emotional Rescue" than "Dirty Mind." "My Mathematical Mind" should throw some serious sparks live, straddling a vicious groove with all the molar-grinding gusto of anything off 2002's *Kill The Moonlight*. The infectious "Sister Jack" is the best power-pop anthem fellow Austin misfits Cotton Mather never recorded, and it makes optimal use of Spoon's studio-savvy secret weapon, drummer Jim Eno. *Gimme Fiction*'s fictional side B (for "boring") begins on a subdued note with "I Summon You," what sounds like a somber eulogy to a friend (or lover) with a lethal self-destructive streak. This is followed by a quartet of droney sameness that essentially grinds *Moonlight*'s funkiest ingredients into a sluggish, repetitive pulp. Talk about a letdown (and that's a fact). **[Merge, www.mergerecords.com]**

—Hobart Rowland

STARFLYER 59
TALKING VOICE VS. SINGING VOICE

The American Shoegaze Reaction of '93-'94 has few alumni still hanging around. Starflyer 59 is a far cry from *Loveless* in 2005 (hell, most imitators had moved on by '95), even though Jason Martin—the band's sole static member—has chosen to hang on to the early-'90s ethereal-pop moniker for his marriages of dream pop and Christianity. For this episode, Martin enlists the ghosts of late-'80s British jangle, before the volume of shoegaze and before indie rock was even named yet.

TEENAGE FANCLUB
MAN-MADE

There's something to be said for the dogged consistency shown by Teenage Fanclub over the years since the release of its landmark *Bandwagonesque* in 1991. But that was back when Kurt Cobain was still capable of proclaiming Teenage Fanclub the best band in the world. What has to be said is this Scottish quartet is comfortable in its uncomplicated skin: happy to jump up and down in the same spot, spilling out fuzz-guitar sunshine and dark-hued lyrics and, some might say, going nowhere. On *Man-Made*'s "Time Stops" (which could serve as the band's motto), the members of Teenage Fanclub sing, "There is more to life than I aim for/So much under the sun I should play for/Before I'm taken." But fans of the band's Big Star/Byrds/Beach Boys power-pop gleam don't want their heroes to change, because what these earnest, mellow lads do best is timeless. Needless to say, the obsessive willingness to endlessly cultivate the same tiny plot of musical ground is precisely what drives Teenage Fanclub's detractors mad. For those who can't get enough melodic candy, however, the cluster of three-minute pop tunes on *Man-Made* is a welcome return to easy-to-trace guitar-and-vocal layering after a string of records on which the group's one-trick brilliance developed a wobble and its magic waned. The stark, piano-led "Only With You," the rocked-up "Feel" and the simple, gorgeous "It's All In My Mind" qualify as some of band's best work yet. A sweet *déjà vu*, it's 1991 over again. **[Merge, www.mergerecords.com]**

—Robert Baird

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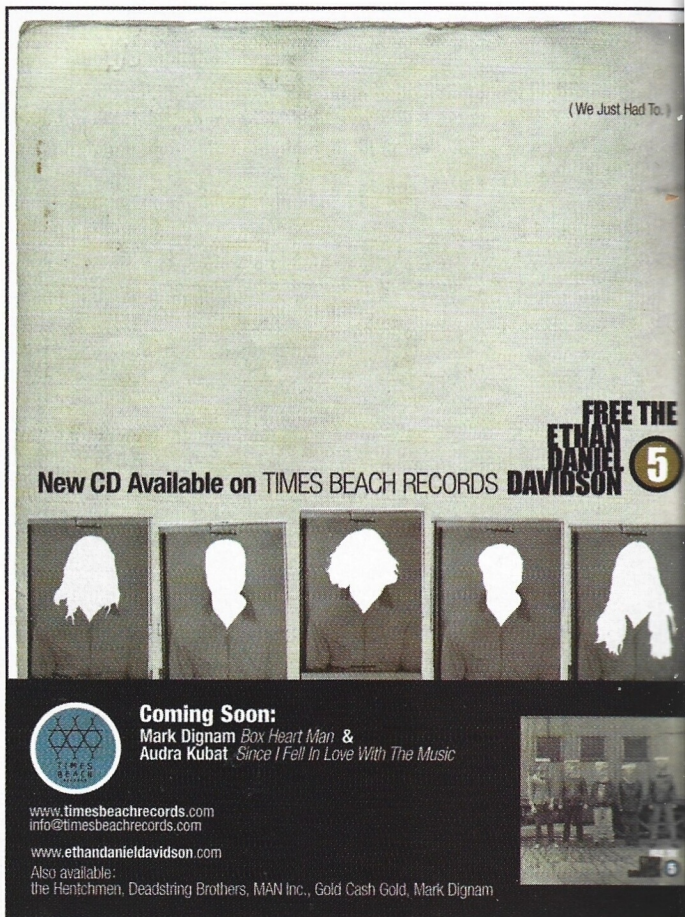
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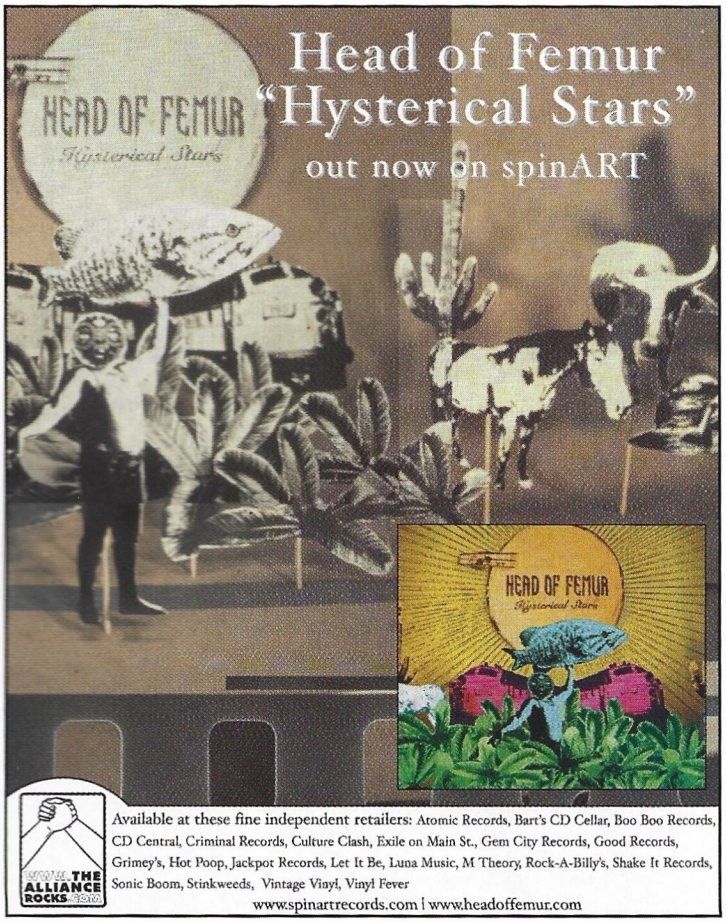
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The Lightning Seeds, Mighty Lemon Drops and Kitchens Of Distinction can be heard (whether intentional or not) buzzing around in *Talking Voice Vs. Singing Voice*. To call the album's production "professional" is putting it lightly, as this thing sounds like *Chicago X* played by a louder update of the Ocean Blue. Pleasantly inoffensive, *Talking Voice Vs. Singing Voice* doesn't attempt to cover any new ground, but Martin can put together a song (especially "A Good Living") with the best of them. Because of this, Starflyer 59 manages to stay out of the dreaded hang-it-up-already category. **[Tooth And Nail, www.toothandnail.com]**

—Andrew Earles

THEE MISSOURI
IN VOODOORAMA

Thee Missouri's third LP is what the LCD Soundsystem album could've been if James Murphy weren't so charismatic, smart and funny. Which is to say that *In Voodoorama* and its creator, a foursome that hails from Germany, are none of those things. The album, with its dub-like reverence for space, meshes a Kraftwerk-ian sense of minimalism and percussion (thanks entirely to the lack of a drummer) with rock, particularly that of a vaguely Western variety (thanks in part to a pedal-steel player). But this dining out on genres is a somber meal. Thee Missouri is too laconic and, perhaps, too uncommitted to stage the robot-versus-tumbleweed battle. One-named singer Red does no favors with his every(front)man shtick. His vocal swagger is similar to Murphy's, except it puts a "self-" in front of the parody, with its purposely parched tone and smarmy "baybuh"s. It's a bit of a shame, too, because even though Thee Missouri is misguided for wanting to stretch an EP's worth of musical ideas into an album, the flashes of greatness that do occur are undermined by Red's over-singing of underwritten melodies. **[BlueDisguise, www.bluedisguise.com]**

—Rich Juzwiak

TROUBLED HUBBLE
MAKING BEDS IN A BURNING HOUSE

"To be young, dumb and innocent," sighs Troubled Hubble's Chris Otepka, lending his best Ben Gibbard vocal to "I'm Pretty Sure I Can See Molecules." (Indeed, any of these songs would fit on an *O.C.* soundtrack.) But Otepka's lyric is a touch inaccurate. This Chicago-area four-piece lacks the pubescent unrest that powers some of Lookout! Records' big-name pop/punk (Green Day, Ted Leo). Layers of jangle mimic Built To Spill and horn overtures reach at Neutral Milk Hotel, but Troubled Hubble is too self-conscious for its own ambition. The bittersweet songs on *Making Beds In A Burning House* recall the Promise Ring, which created escapist gems by assembling the same elements with clever confidence. Troubled Hubble delivers bouncy melodies and overriding pessimism so straightforward and dry, nothing is drawn from that paradox. Otepka spouts free-form prose with the same enunciation on every syllable, exemplifying a maddening Midwestern singing style; each word seems to evaporate within the song seconds after it floats placidly out of his mouth. But on closer "Nancy," an ultra-simplified version of every previous track, Troubled Hubble nails it. Riding an irresistible vibrant hook, Otepka opens his throat and really starts singing, and for the first time, the band is on the same page. Troubled Hubble is a lot more fun when it's dumb. **[Lookout!, www.lookoutrecords.com]**

—Natalie Jacobs

TURIN BRAKES
JACKINABOX

With its androgynous vocals and crystalline guitars, Turin Brakes are uplifting on the surface, but it would be a mistake to dismiss Gale Paridjanian and Olly Knights as smiley-faced lightweights. "Seems everyone is dying or curling up in pain," sings Knights on "Road To Nowhere." Although the British duo's lyrical approach hasn't changed, *JackInABox* hears Turin Brakes return to the simpler production style of 2001 debut *The Optimist LP*. Contrast this with 2003's *Ether Song*, which received lush treatment from producer Tony Hoffer (Beck, Air). The less-is-more approach suits them, as their gorgeous songs need no embellishment. "Last clown drinking in a bar that's about to be closed down," croons Knights on "Last Clown," while a simple guitar transforms the melancholy song into a moment of pop bliss. There are no real stylistic departures here, although the rollicking chorus of "Red Moon" is the closest the Brakes have come to rocking out. Mostly, *JackInABox* deals in the unlikely juxtaposition of loveliness and bitterness; it's the musical equivalent of the shiny apple with the rotten core or the funeral procession on a bright, sunny day. **[Astralwerks, www.astralwerks.com]**

—Matt Ryan

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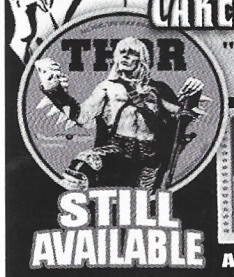

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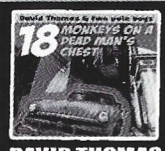

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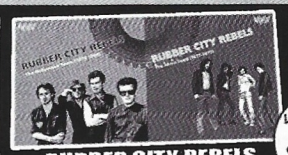

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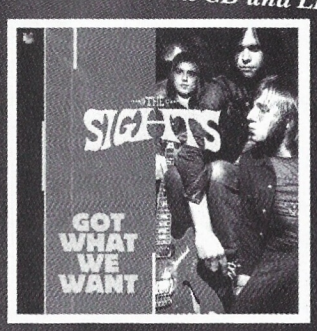

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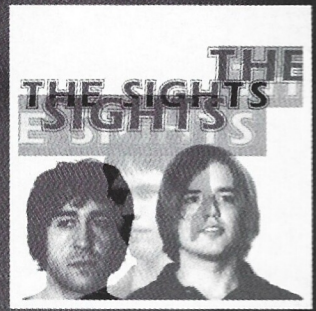

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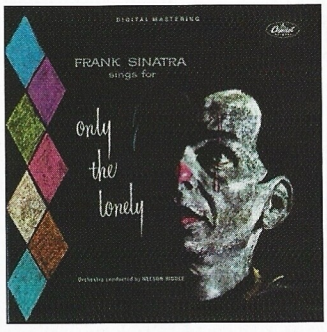
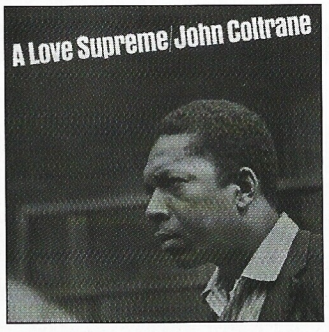
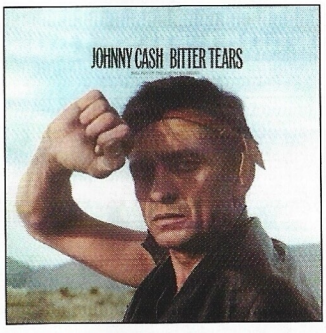
Sound Check

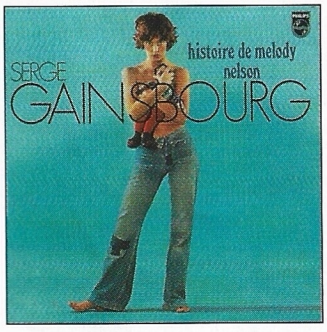
High Concept: Johnny Cash, John Coltrane, Marvin Gaye

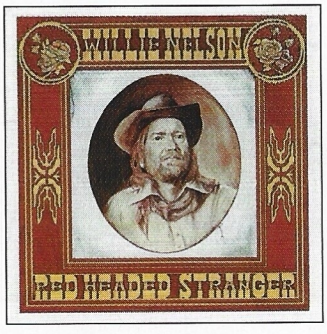
Concept albums. Rock operas. Song cycles. The very thought of this tangled corner of the pop-music universe is enough to send the average fan running in the opposite direction, recoiling in mock horror from some of the genre's most self-indulgent nonsense. (*Tales From Topographic Oceans* or *Kilroy Was Here*, anyone?) Although it's become increasingly difficult to distinguish between the substrata, the concept album is generally acknowledged to have been invented by Frank Sinatra during the 1950s, when he recorded a series of full-length records consisting of songs unified around common themes. This trend evolved into the so-called rock opera, in which artists endeavored to string tracks together in service of a running narrative. (The Pretty Things' *S.F. Sorrow*, for example, or the Who's *Tommy*.) Then, of course, came the song cycles of the '70s—the genre's halcyon days—with Pink Floyd, the Kinks and Lou Reed staking their careers on album-length excursions ranging from wistful examinations of England's past to Grand Guignol self-mythology. While rock 'n' roll has never been shy about baring its soul in service of a story, what has been left unexamined are the less obvious—if arguably more influential—contributions to the conceptual canon, particularly those recorded in the jazz, soul and country traditions.

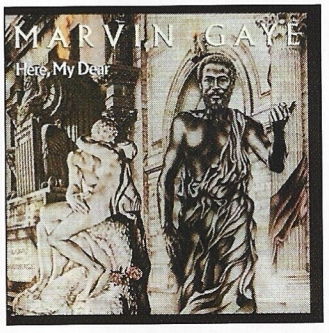












Frank Sinatra *Sings For Only The Lonely* (Capitol): By the time this was released in 1958, Ol' Blue Eyes was already two records deep into his quartet of so-called "suicide albums," the result of his broken marriage to actress Ava Gardner. For an LP that plumbs the depths of depression, heartache and despair, *Sings For Only The Lonely* struck a chord with Sinatra's public: It went gold and remained in the U.S. pop charts for 120 weeks, even winning a Grammy for best album cover. Its ballads are some of the most exquisitely rendered odes to sadness he recorded, with Nelson Riddle's lush orchestral backdrops serving as reverb-heavy guardrails for Sinatra's bel canto encomiums to bottomless longing ("What's New?"), bottomless desperation ("Only The Lonely") and bottomless boozy bitching about broads ("One For My Baby").

John Coltrane *A Love Supreme* (Impulse!/Verve): Tenor-saxophone legend Coltrane called this album his "humble offering to God"; the rest of us can get by with calling it "essential." 1964's *A Love Supreme* was recorded in a single December evening by Coltrane and his quartet: drummer Elvin Jones, pianist McCoy Tyner and bassist Jimmy Garrison. Coltrane, a recovering heroin addict who had kicked for good seven years earlier, was increasingly convinced of God's role in his deliverance from self-destruction and had become a deeply religious man. *A Love Supreme* meant to capture this consciousness through its four-part progression. The undulating bass line on "Acknowledgment" repeats a four-note motif built around the phrase "a love supreme" and signals Coltrane's spiritual awakening. It yields to the second movement, "Resolution," which features some high-flying improvisation intended to reenact a dervish surrendering himself to divinity. With its varying series of solo runs, third act "Pursuance" embodies the search for understanding. "Psalm" marks the conclusion of the quest for enlightenment, with Coltrane improvising a version of the poem of praise printed on the record's dust jacket.

Johnny Cash *Bitter Tears (Ballads Of The American Indian)* (Columbia/Legacy): Way before Native American chic became a by-product of the hippie legacy (Cher's hit 1973 album *Half Breed*, for example), the Man In Black crafted this 1964 tribute. Whereas Cash's previous concept works largely focus on cowboys and Western pioneers, *Bitter Tears* turns its eye toward the mistreatment of Native Americans. "The Ballad Of Ira Hayes" was an unlikely hit, given its unblinking depiction of a Pima tribe member who went on to serve in World War II (Hayes was one of those pictured hoisting the flag at Iwo Jima), only to end up dying drunk in a roadside ditch at the age of 33. "White Girl," however, is the album's revelation. The tale of a doomed interracial romance would help provoke (alongside the work of Bob Dylan) a more candid assessment of the state of race relations coming out of the civil-rights movement.

Serge Gainsbourg *Histoire De Melody Nelson* (Polydor): Gainsbourg's diary of a dirty old man may only measure 27 minutes in length, but it's proven to be his shot heard 'round the world. The 1971 album has been sampled by De La Soul ("En Melody"), and its strings have been slavishly emulated by Beck (*Sea Change* owes a debt to the sweeping, somber arrangements of Jean-Claude Vannier). *Histoire De Melody Nelson*'s skeletal, jazz-like structure—with bass frequently playing the role of lead instrument—influenced a generation of indie-rock tastemakers. A single listen to the album's final suite, the seven-minute "Cargo Culte," finds the DNA of Spiritualized, Primal Scream, Yo La Tengo and Air leaping from its grooves. But *Melody Nelson*'s sheer sleaze factor has yet to be truly captured by any of its admirers. Loosely based on Nabokov's *Lolita*, Gainsbourg's lascivious tale of May/December seduction fairly drips with perversity and a desiccated innocence, right down to the cover photo of longtime muse Jane Birkin, whose half-naked nymphet's pose with rag doll in hand perfectly suits the proceedings.

Willie Nelson *Red Headed Stranger* (Columbia/Legacy): Nelson penned plenty of hits during his lengthy stint in Nashville, but they were always for other people (Patsy Cline, Ray Price, Faron Young). Having left town when his house burned down, Nelson moved back

home to Texas and signed with Columbia, whose faith was immediately tested when he recorded 1975's spare, contemplative *Red Headed Stranger*. Nelson had been singing the song "Red Headed Stranger" as a bedtime story to his children for years, and its fluid narrative of a preacher on the run from the law after killing his wife and her illicit lover served as the basis for the album's 15-song story. The album was done in a day and a half for $20,000 and, unconventional as it was, went on to sell three million copies. Nelson hit the top of the country charts with his low-key rendition of Fred Rose's 1945 chestnut "Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain," and "outlaw country" went on to become one of the most influential genres of the '70s, with Nelson and comrades Waylon Jennings, Merle Haggard and Tompall Glaser turning Gram Parsons' country/rock quicksilver into solid gold.

Marvin Gaye *Here, My Dear* (Motown): From its sardonic title and vicious, divorce-court-themed artwork to its financially motivated underpinnings, 1978's *Here, My Dear* is arguably the most untethered ode to the dissolution of love ever recorded. By the mid-'70s, Gaye's marriage to Anna Gordy Gaye (sister of Motown founder Berry Gordy) was in shambles. With Gaye behind in his alimony payments and facing contempt-of-court charges, his attorney devised a plan to alleviate Gaye's financial woes by having him record an album whose advance and royalties would be granted to his ex-wife as part of their divorce settlement. Gaye initially intended to "do a quickie record, nothing even good. Why should I break my neck when Anna was going to wind up with the money anyway?" But he eventually became so obsessed with capturing his crumbling relationship for posterity that he instead turned in one of the most inspired albums of his career. *Here, My Dear* was the wrong record at the wrong time, a decidedly non-commercial career-killer floated into the public eye during the waning days of disco. Its soulful saga of a broken man garnered mostly negative reviews and quickly went out of print. But the critical reassessment of Gaye's catalog in the wake of his 1984 shooting death at the hands of his father has cemented its status as one of pop's defining concept works. **[Capitol, www.hollywoodandvine.com; Columbia/Legacy, www.legacyrecordings.com; Impulse!/Verve, www.vervemusicgroup.com; Motown, www.motown.com; Polydor, www.polydor.co.uk]**

—Corey duBrowa

PUMPING ON YOUR STEREO

Aimee Mann: That '70s Show

Whether reminding us that "Voices Carry" with her '80s pop band 'Til Tuesday or raging against the industry's starmaker machinery as a solo artist, Aimee Mann has emerged as one of the finest songwriters of her generation. Her fifth solo album, *The Forgotten Arm* (SuperEgo), finds her treading conceptual turf, weaving the tale of a boxer's life into the tragedy of a love turned sour.

After I got off the tour for (2002's) *Lost In Space*, I was thinking about the next record, and one of the themes that kept coming up for me—because I was dealing with it directly in my life—was the idea of drug addiction and attempting to have relationships with people who are alcoholics and addicts. The first few songs I wrote [were inspired by that], but then I came up with "King Of The Jailhouse," which was about two people who had run away together, and I thought, "Why not make these characters real and give them names and invent a past life for them?"

In 2003, there was a concept album by the Honeydogs called *10,000 Years*, and it was my favorite record of that year. The songs were so great that it didn't matter if you knew what the concept was or not, but the fact that the writer cared enough to write more than one song about it and that it had meaning from beginning to end was so great. There's a lot of music now that sounds like it's computer-generated, totally divorced from a guy sitting down with his instrument. And it's funny, because I feel like one of those people at the turn of the century chasing after the car yelling, "Get a horse!" Everyone's extracting meaning and feeling and emotion from almost every aspect of music, and for me, a concept album was the antidote to that.

There's also a really fine line between telling a story that's fictional with lots of tiny details, and then removing yourself too much from the story, so that it's bloodless, a little too fictional. The characters in *The Forgotten Arm*, John and Caroline, provided me with a way to tell my stories through the lens of other people.

Making this record, I was listening to Rod Stewart's *Every Picture Tells A Story*, and some of those songs were big influences. "Maggie May" is the quintessential people-running-off-together story, and it's a fucking disaster! It's not, "Do you love her or not?" It's a very mature, complex thing.

Another great album is *Tumbleweed Connection* by Elton John, which has that kind of Civil War/Southern thing, where the songs don't necessarily touch each other thematically—and a few of them are like, "This is a total psychedelic number"—but they all have a down-home flavor that helps the album hang together. I was also listening to Carole King's *Tapestry*. Those were the kinds of records I wanted to make, but with a little bump up in the story, so the same characters would be running throughout it.

—C.D.

Collectibles

JIMMY WEBB | FALL | TOM WAITS | BYRDS | JULIAN COPE | X-RAY SPEX

It's 1970, and a music-hungry teenager is in the lobby of a small AM radio station scouring through the boxes of promotional 45s. Among this afternoon's haul is a white-label, mono/stereo single bearing the Reprise Records "steamboat" logo. Later, at home, the kid cues up the 45 and is transfixed: A simple descending piano motif is followed by a fragile, slightly reedy male vocal warbling the intriguing lines, "I have been seekin' P.F. Sloan, but no one knows where he has gone/No one ever heard the song that boy set winging."

Thirty-five years later, I'm listening to *The Moon's A Harsh Mistress* (Rhino Handmade), a limited-edition, five-CD **Jimmy Webb** boxed set collecting the songwriter's '70s albums—*Words And Music*, *And So: On*, *Letters*, *Land's End*, *El Mirage*—along with an unreleased concert set from '72 and a disc of studio outtakes. Not only does "P.F. Sloan" come rushing back, the 48-page booklet included with the box summons a visual sense memory from that afternoon at the radio station as well: Among the rare photos and journalist Ben Edmonds' exhaustive liner notes is a reproduction of the "P.F. Sloan" single's white label.

Jimmy Webb

Think of Webb as a cross between Brian Wilson, Harry Nilsson and Burt Bacharach, with maybe some Ray Davies thrown in for transnational perspective. After authoring a slew of pop hits during the '60s for the likes of the Fifth Dimension ("Up, Up And Away"), Richard Harris ("MacArthur Park") and, of course, Glen Campbell ("Galveston," "Wichita Lineman"), Webb became determined to make his mark as a performer, too. Whether for reasons of timing, marketing or simply artistic bloody-mindedness, his solo records never sold, yet all have merit. Singling out but one of the five studio albums, 1972's *Letters* finds Webb in superb voice and luminous at the keyboard, particularly on "Galveston," the Boudleaux Bryant-penned "Love Hurts" and the melodically buoyant, lyrically caustic "Catharsis (Mr. Shuck And Jive)," a *j'accuse*-type number worthy of Randy Newman. Webb could also rock when he wanted to; check the swaggering, fuzztone-splattered "Song Seller." The *Live At The Royal Albert Hall* disc is equally fascinating for its orchestrated renditions of Webb compositions and for an eye-popping version of Frank Zappa's "My Guitar Wants To Kill Your Mama." In a sense, though, the lyrics to "P.F. Sloan" proved prophetic; not too many people heard the songs Webb was singing in the '70s. (Nor in the '80s or '90s, during which time he only recorded three albums.) But with the evidence on *The Moon's A Harsh Mistress*, perhaps the long-overdue Webb reappraisal is at hand.

When **Julian Cope** dropped out of the music business in the mid-'90s, he didn't actually retire. Instead, he shifted operations to the home front and began issuing records, many of them wildly experimental, via his Head Heritage label. The two-CD *Citizen Cain'd*, reputedly gestating since 1997, was worth the wait. It opens with the one-two punch of Crazy Horse-like "Hell Is Wicked" and Stooges/MC5 overdrive number "I Can't Hardly Stand It." Clearly, Cope spells things R-O-C-K these days: *Cain'd* sounds like it could be some long-lost archival treasure from the late '60s/early '70s, with images of the Seeds, Alice Cooper and Blue Öyster Cult barreling past. On Harleys.

Head Heritage also has a collection of rare and unreleased material from Cope's old band, the **Teardrop Explodes**. Among the 16 odds 'n' sods found on *Zoology* are early radio and TV performances, a cover of John Cale's "I'm Not The Loving Kind" and a rough-yet-fascinating "Books" from '78, different from the version on 1980's *Kilimanjaro*. Those with bunny-sized ears will detect none other than Ian McCulloch handling lead vocals on "Books." Echo & The Bunnymen, of course, would do their own version of the tune (titled "Read It In Books") in 1979.

Two key artifacts from the British punk and post-punk eras have just been given the remastered/expanded treatment. **X-Ray Spex**'s sole album, 1978's *Germ Free Adolescents* (Castle), is highlighted by the band's arty-yet-ferocious guitar/sax assault and, of course, the sassy vocal yip of Poly Styrene. In addition to the original LP's dozen tunes, the reissue includes four non-album tracks (notably, monumental '77 debut "Oh! Bondage Up Yours!" and '79 swansong "Highly Inflammable") and a pair of 1978 Peel sessions. Incisive liner notes from scribe Kieron Tyler tell the brief, colorful Spex story.

Moving forward to 1982, we have *Hex Induction Hour* (Castle) from the **Fall**. Described in issue #64 as "not so much the place to start as the ditch to stumble into [and containing] some of the Fall's most singular, intricate grooves," *Hex* boils nonstop and has now been given an extreme makeover. Newly appended is a bonus disc comprising '81 BBC tracks, a non-LP b-side (the uproarious "I'm Into C.B.") and 38 minutes' worth of live rarities from 1981-82. The concert version of "C.B." is a must-hear: Subtitled the "Stars On 45 Version," it's a medley of "C.B.," "Psykick Dance Hall" and "Fiery Jack" done atop a fractured disco beat.

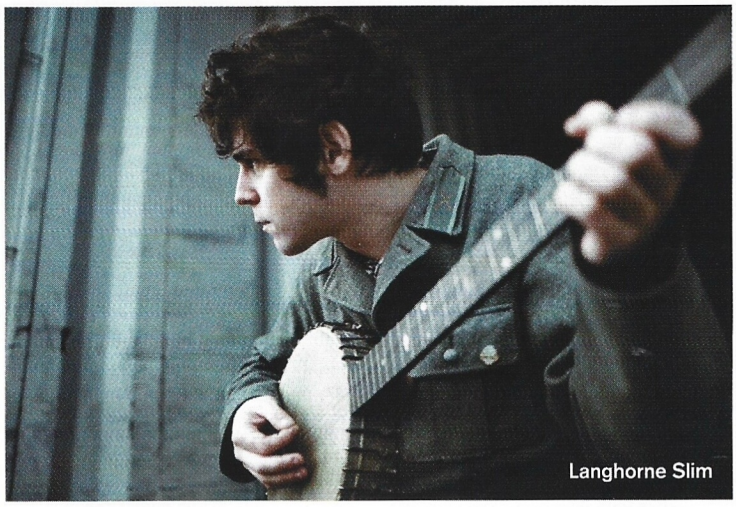
Vinyl-fetish alert: The **Byrds'** *Another Dimension* (Sundazed) is a limited-edition, double-10-inch set featuring 12 unreleased outtakes from the band's 1966 magnum opus, *Fifth Dimension*. From instrumental backing tracks for "Eight Miles High" and "Why" to an "unsweetened" (i.e., no overdubbed strings) version of "Wild Mountain Thyme" and a powerful live reading of "Hey Joe" originally broadcast on Swedish radio, the collection complements the 1996 CD reissue of *Fifth Dimension*, which added six different unreleased cuts. Liners were penned by MAGNET contributing editor Jud Cost, and the inside sleeve adds the transcript of a '66 Byrds press conference.

In today's era of unrestricted file-sharing, bootleggers have taken a proportionally bigger hit in business than aboveground labels, which is why a lot of bootlegs increasingly boast eye-catching packaging aimed at the collector. Such is the case with a new two-CD **Tom Waits** title, *Back In The Good Old World* (Aural Delights). A crackling, in-your-face audience recording from last fall's European tour (November 15 in Berlin), it's highlighted by *Real Gone* standouts "Don't Go Into That Barn" and "Top Of The Hill" (which interpolates Mungo Jerry's "In The Summertime") and a closing "Jockey Full Of Bourbon" that'll leave you pounding your shot glass and demanding more. **[Castle, www.sanctuaryrecordsgroup.co.uk; Head Heritage, www.headheritage.co.uk; Rhino Handmade, www.rhinohandmade.com; Sundazed, www.sundazed.com]**

—Fred Mills

Americana

LANGHORNE SLIM | MICAH P. HINSON



Langhorne Slim

Sean Scolnick isn't sure why he decided to take on the y'all sobriquet **Langhorne Slim**. If the puzzling opening lines of "My Future" are any indication, he's not going to solve that mystery anytime soon. "I can't predict my future/Can't predict my past/Seems like every waking second without you, lover/May as well be Langhorne."

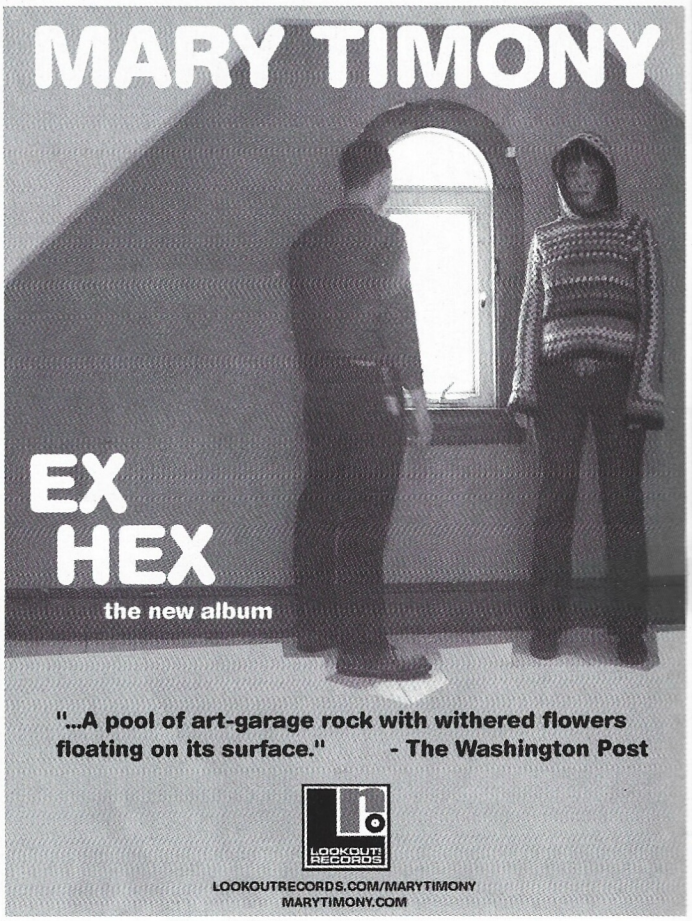
In Scolnick's case, self-discovery may be needless torture. He's an original-yet-precarious cross between an overhootenannied urban folkster and a smart-ass punk troubadour with retro duds and a down-home audience-participation shtick ("somebody say, 'Hey!'"). Scolnick calls his musical background "a shitty mixture" of bluegrass, Nirvana, Daniel Johnston and Harry Smith's *Anthology Of American Folk Music*. His wardrobe, which he says he wears even when he's not onstage, comes from his grandfathers Sid and Jack. "They were hat wearers and suit wearers," says Scolnick. "So growing up, I raided both of their closets and got most of their goodies."

Like his nearby neighbors Dean and Gene Ween (who've also dabbled in country parody/tribute), this 24-year-old from Langhorne, Pa., realized early on that if he was going to both wink and bow to the ragged traditions of country music, he'd have to take his work seriously. "Basically, I have no fucking idea how I started playing country songs or whatever I play," he says. "It's not a conscious process. In order to do what me or a lot of other people are trying to do, you have to be a sick individual in a way—where you're living to be on a stage and be judged by a crowd of strangers. For some reason, Langhorne Slim is what I snap into."

On his full-length debut, *When The Sun's Gone Down* (Narnack), Scolnick's music is the focus. Tunes such as banjo-driven opener "In The Midnight," frenetic hit-in-waiting "Loretta Lee Jones," short-and-sweet cartoon sacrilege "Mary" and "The Electric Love Letter" (which has a line about how his girl "tastes like pumpkin pie") show a jaunty, determined sense of songwriting. Scolnick's high, piercing voice—an unholy cross between Black Francis squawking, Bob Dylan rambling and Cat Stevens quavering—is a love-it-or-hate-it proposition.

Unlike the mostly upbeat Scolnick, **Micah P. Hinson**, a Christian fundamentalist turned tortured singer/songwriter, has been to the dark side. After a drug-fueled downward spiral as a teenager in Abilene, Texas, Hinson ended up in jail, then homeless. His debut, *Micah P. Hinson And The Gospel Of Progress*, released last year in the U.K., has now been issued in the U.S. on the Overcoat label. Produced and orchestrated in a spare and delicate style by fellow Texas expats the Earlies, *Progress* is a downbeat, cathartic collection of songs. On Hinson's most striking tune, "Don't You (Part 1&2)," you can hear the sound of one man wearily paying dues and longing for rescue. **[Narnack, www.narnackrecords.com; Overcoat, www.overcoatrecordings.com]**

—Robert Baird



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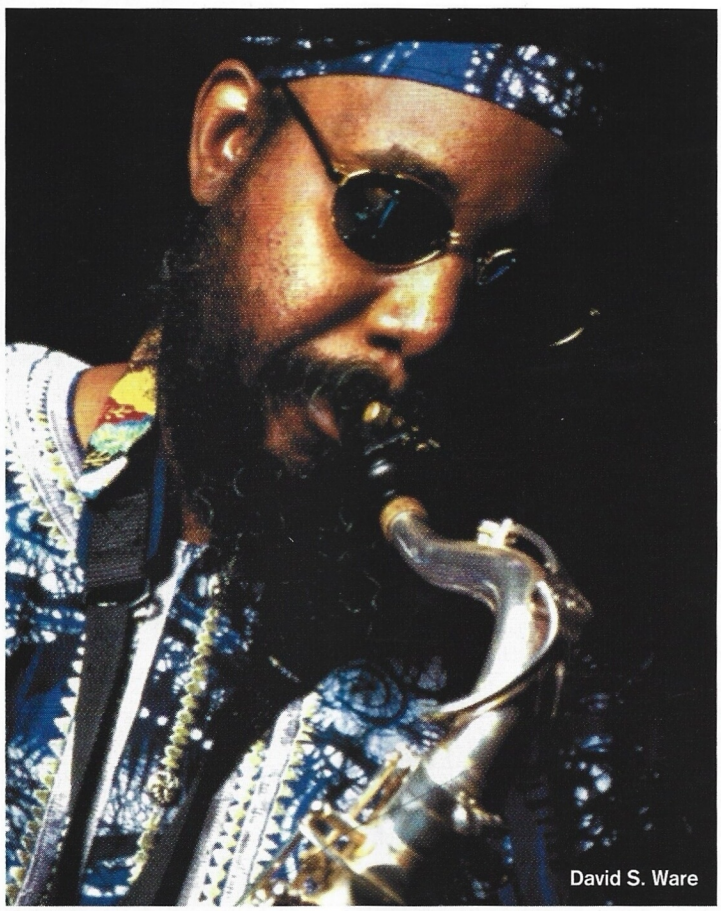
Free/Jazz

SUN RA | ALBERT AYLER | DAVID S. WARE QUARTETS | CHICAGO LUZERN EXCHANGE

The story of free jazz would be very different without ESP-Disk. Despite the attention the major jazz labels brought to artists such as Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane, most cutting-edge jazz musicians in the '60s had a hard time getting heard or recorded. On Christmas Day 1963, a young show-business attorney named Bernard Stollman caught a concert by saxophonist Albert Ayler. Stollman impulsively offered to put out Ayler's record, and ESP-Disk was born. Between 1966 and 1976, the label issued dozens of albums by a who's who of the New Thing, as the music was then known, including Ayler, Coleman, Sun Ra, Pharoah Sanders, Frank Lowe and Henry Grimes. Each LP bore the legend "the artists alone decide what you will hear on their ESP Disk," a testament to the autonomy the label afforded them; early albums also bore script in the Esperanto language, another of Stollman's passions. Though ESP often failed to compensate its musicians, the label's wide distribution in the U.S. and abroad helped spread the free-jazz gospel.

In the '90s, a succession of European labels released ESP material on CD, but now Stollman has reasserted direct control over the catalog. Not only has he begun re-pressing vintage sides, he's started issuing new music. There are rumors of contemporary releases in the offing, but the first two new CDs are previously unreleased archival recordings.



David S. Ware

Sun Ra fans won't want to pass up *Heliocentric Worlds Vol. 3*. The tapes show signs of wear, but the performances are quite good. Like Ra's two similarly named volumes for ESP, they're forged from an alloy of primitive electronics, exotic percussion, plaster-cracking horn solos and tradition-steeped swing rhythms

Albert Ayler's *Live On The Riviera* is more problematic. Fanatics will want to pick it up, but novices should start with the ESP album that started it all, *Spiritual Unity*. The saxophonist's playing on *Riviera*, recorded at the Foundation du Maeght in France on the first day of his last European stand in 1970, is excellent. He provides the raw, highly emotive sounds for which he's best known, as well as some more restrained and conventionally lyrical parts when he accompanies his girlfriend, vocalist Mary Maria. Unfortunately, the balance tips heavily in favor of vocals here; a little bit of Maria's singing—or Ayler's, for that matter—goes a long way, and the rhythm section sounds like it's scrambling to keep up.

On *Live In The World* (Thirsty Ear), a triple-CD by the **David S. Ware Quartets**, the tenor saxophonist takes stock of his music. During the '90s, this band—which consists of pianist Matthew Shipp, bassist William Parker and a rotating cast of drummers—set the gold standard for spiritually minded, jazz-rooted energy music. But the group's recent experiments with strings and electronics have yielded mixed results; apparently, it's hard to know where to go once you've climbed to the top of the mountain. *Live In The World* includes one concert with former drummer Susie Ibarra that was recorded in Switzerland in 1998 and two more from Italy in 2003, one with current percussionist Guillermo Brown, another featuring a titanic guest turn by Hamid Drake. Together, these discs confirm the Quartet's volcanic power. They also show how hard it must be to be its drummer. Shipp, Parker and Ware improvise like they're tapped into a common brain. They anticipate each other's moves and spur each other on, juxtaposing yearning melodies and surging rhythms. The moments when each drummer drops out show how necessary the instrument's role is. Without a percussive push, the music's heaviness impels it to collapse like a sonic black hole. Yet the drummers are on the outside, not quite a part of things. Ibarra's solution is to get poetic and decorative, Brown to be visceral and driving. Drake covers both extremes with such ease and imagination that you hope he would play with the Quartet more often. This excellent collection rewards repeat listening, but it leaves one question open: What next?

In Chicago, that question is being taken up by a new crop of young musicians who treat as a given the personal and stylistic connections that Ken Vandermark and his cohorts have forged with European free improvisers. Consider **Chicago Luzern Exchange**. In 2002, the Chicago Sister Cities International Program gave Marc Unternährer, a professional tubaist who plays both jazz and classical music in Luzern, Switzerland, a place to stay for five months. While in Chicago, he jammed with cornetist Josh Berman, tenor saxophonist Keefe Jackson and drummer Frank Rosaly, who all play jazz at pass-the-hat gigs in local venues such as 3030 (a former Pentecostal church) and the Hungry Brain (a neighborhood bar). Despite their differing circumstances and backgrounds, they developed such a rapport that Unternährer returned to Chicago twice. The rest of the band repaid the favor, which was hardly a chore. "Luzern is like looking into a snow globe or a postcard," says Berman. "It's beautiful, and there's a fantastic community of musicians there."

The group's lineup, with cornet (the instrument Louis Armstrong played before he switched to trumpet) and tuba, harks back to the dawn of jazz; it's one clarinet shy of Dixieland. But the band's sound is resolutely modern and fueled by a remarkable chemistry that distinguishes Chicago Luzern Exchange from most free improv in two ways. The group is quite succinct; 12 of the 19 improvisations on its debut, *Several Lights* (Delmark), clock less than three minutes. Despite its impromptu genesis, the music—which freely mixes unconventional instrumental techniques, jagged interlocking passages and moments of unabashed expression—coheres as though it were written out. "Those are some of the reasons we stay together," says Berman. "We have the instant composing capacity to make short statements that get to the point of the music we're making. I like short pieces that tell me what I need to know quickly." **[Delmark, www.delmark.com; ESP, www.espdisk.com; Thirsty Ear, www.thirstyear.com]**

—Bill Meyer

Amplified

UNSANE

Unsane

A few months ago, **Unsane** singer/guitarist Chris Spencer was wandering the streets of New York with a tape recorder, capturing the sounds of the city. One of the recordings, the warning beeps of a truck backing up, opens *Blood Run* (Relapse), the band's first album of new material in seven years. The intro is appropriate, as Unsane continues to be the aural equivalent of several tons of metal and diesel plowing you under on the streets of NYC. It was these same streets where the band got its start in 1989, birthing a Lower East Side noise scene with the likes of Helmet, Surgery and Pussy Galore. "We kind of represent that old scene," says Spencer.

The original incarnation of Unsane included Spencer, drummer Charles Ondras and bassist Pete Shore. The trio released its self-titled debut on Matador in 1991. Although representing one of the more classic mismatches of band and label, *Unsane* is a landmark recording in terms of a brutal noise aesthetic.

While the group enjoyed auspicious beginnings, the ensuing years haven't been kind to Unsane. Ondras died of a drug overdose in 1992 and was replaced by Vinny Signorelli, erstwhile skin basher for Foetus and Swans. Unsane was then eaten up and spat out by the major-label machinery with 1993's *Total Destruction*. A few releases on Amphetamine Reptile would follow, along with the 1994 departure of Shore, who was replaced by Dave Curran.

Then, while Spencer was on tour in Europe in 1998, he was attacked by four American-hating thugs and nearly beaten to death after leaving a Vienna bar. Following emergency surgery to repair his mangled internal organs, Spencer was soon touring again. Ultimately, however, Unsane's travails over the course of a decade led to its dissolution in 2000, at which time Spencer packed his bags for the West Coast.

Spencer returned to New York City a couple years ago, a move that led to the reformation of Unsane. Marking the band's return is the abrasive *Blood Run*, a reference to Spencer's trips to a slaughterhouse to procure buckets of blood for Unsane's gore-splattered album cover shoots.

"That's my bathroom on the cover of *Blood Run*," he says of the record sleeve's murder scene. "A friend of ours offered to do it. I'm surprised anyone would sit in a bathtub of cow's blood for that long, but she was pretty cool about it."

Unsane's visuals are no less horrific after 16 years, so it's not surprising the music has retained its skull-crushing aggression. "It's just how we like to write music," explains Spencer. "It's not like we choose our genre."

So there are no pretty acoustic numbers in Unsane's future?

"I thought about it," says Spencer with a laugh. "It was a passing thought. It was there, then it was gone. I kind of like volume." **[Relapse, www.relapse.com]**

—Matt Ryan

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Vintage

CAN

Can

Though now seen as a giant among 20th-century rock bands, **Can** was once considered an enigma wrapped in a riddle tied up in a Duchamp painting. Inspired by groundbreaking '60s rock artists, free-form American jazz and avant-garde electronic music, Can formed in Cologne, Germany, in 1968 and had a bountiful 10-year run. Spawned by such seemingly incompatible elements, it's surprising the band survived its own birth pains, let alone thrived to produce more than a dozen albums, many of which are revered as cornerstones of progressive rock. Mute Records continues its campaign to restore the Can back catalog to print with four albums released between 1972 and 1975: *Future Days*, *Soon Over Babaluma*, *Unlimited Edition* and *Landed*. No bonus material is included, but the remastering has been overseen by the surviving band members.

It may have appeared from these distant shores that Can—whose core included Irmin Schmidt's otherworldly keyboards, Holger Czukay's thumping bass, Michael Karoli's spidery guitar and Jaki Liebezeit's minimalist percussion—was top dog in a full-blown German musical renaissance. Along with like-minded combos Tangerine Dream, Amon Düül, Neu!, Faust and Kraftwerk, Can was dubbed krautrock by a British music press eager to pigeonhole this new rock 'n' roll hotbed. However, Schmidt insists, there was no real German scene.

"We knew them all," he says, "but since these groups lived in different German cities and the distance to each one was more than 600 kilometers, we didn't see them very often."

Schmidt dismisses San Francisco's lysergic bender as having little to do with Can's creation. "We were much more interested in Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart than this San Francisco psychedelic music," he says. "And there was also much less influence by the Velvet Underground than people thought."

Can's real infernal gadget was Liebezeit, a human dynamo and master of obscure time signatures whose rhythmic groove stoked the band's fire for live sets that occasionally lasted up to seven hours. "That was not the usual length," says Schmidt. "Around three-and-a-half hours was our normal time. But if you have the obsession and the energy, why not?"

Protégés of famed avant-garde electronic composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, Schmidt and Czukay suspected there was more to music than the work of the modern composers they'd studied in the classroom. "I began to think of this project as having all contemporary music of the 20th century," says Schmidt. "There was jazz—I especially liked Pharoah Sanders—and I really liked the rhythmic side of this new black music from the States, like Jimi Hendrix and James Brown." Adding electronic sampling and a taste for the ethnically exotic to the mix, Can had a package no one had ever assembled.

Schmidt and Czukay began putting Can together in early 1968. "I knew Jaki when he was playing in a free-jazz group near the Cologne Opera House, where I was working as a pianist," says Schmidt, classically trained as a conductor, keyboardist and composer. Czukay, an old friend with a similar musical background, brought Karoli into the fold. Karoli, Czukay's guitar pupil, would open his bandmates' eyes to the Beatles and other budding rock icons.

The group's debut performance, described by Schmidt as "wild and chaotic," took place at a friend's castle in Cologne called Schloss Norvenich. Eccentric African-American sculptor/painter Malcolm Mooney was added to the lineup as lead vocalist for the gig. "I was very connected to the art scene and had a lot of friends with galleries," says Schmidt. "I told Malcolm maybe I could help him get an exhibition. He didn't get the exhibition, but he came along to the studio and started singing. And there he was: our singer."

Sounding something like Mick Jagger trying to do an Arthur Lee imitation with a sore throat, Mooney cut only one album with the band (billed at the time as "the Can"), 1969 debut *Monster Movie*. Adding Mooney had an immediate effect on the quartet. "Malcolm's rhythmical talent was absolutely amazing," says Schmidt. "Jaki and him just clicked. They were like an ignition switch for our band."

Mooney left the group in late '69 on the advice of his psychiatrist after a series of Syd Barrett-like onstage meltdowns at Schloss Norvenich, where he would harangue audience members for inspecting the paintings instead of listening to the music. He was soon replaced by Japanese singer Damo Suzuki.

"I never would call that lead singing," says Schmidt of Suzuki's hot-wired style, de-emphasized in the studio mix until it seems more duct-taped kidnap victim than vocalist. "Damo was just one of five instruments, using his voice. He didn't even use proper lyrics. He had these sort of Dada lyrics, totally nonsense words, his own creations. There was Japanese and Russian and English and German all mixed in. It was more of a poetic sound creation than song lyrics."

When Suzuki departed in 1973 to become a Jehovah's Witness, Can suffered an emotional tailspin. "This group was so much a living organism, inventing music every night on the spot, that we never rehearsed," says Schmidt. "That means you are more into listening to what others do than exposing your ego with solos. When one member is, shall we say, amputated, the band becomes very fragile."

Can survived Suzuki's defection by splitting occasional vocal duties between Karoli and Schmidt. But a divided Germany had a more lasting effect on Can than the departure of either of its vocalists.

"Being born in Berlin, it mattered quite a lot to me," says Schmidt. "Each time I would return to Berlin, I was standing in front of this fucking wall. Three of us—Holger, Jaki and me—were in our thirties when we started the group, so as kids of seven or eight when the war finished, we experienced bombs and all this struggle with parents having been Nazis, or not. That's why we did music that was not imitating English or American rock music. This was our own experience. We tried to say something which could only have been said in Germany." **[Mute, www.mute.com]**

—Jud Cost

Beats/Breaks

QUASIMOTO

Quasimoto

Otis Jackson, Jr.—or Madlib, the handle the Los Angeles-area native uses when producing his stridently eccentric brand of stoner hop—knows a thing or two about working in disguise. Whether collaborating with masked rap assassin MF Doom in Madvillain, Jay Dee in Jaylib or even with himself as one of the five imaginary performers that make up *faux*-jazz ensemble Yesterday's New Quintet, Jackson has made a name for himself by obscuring his identity.

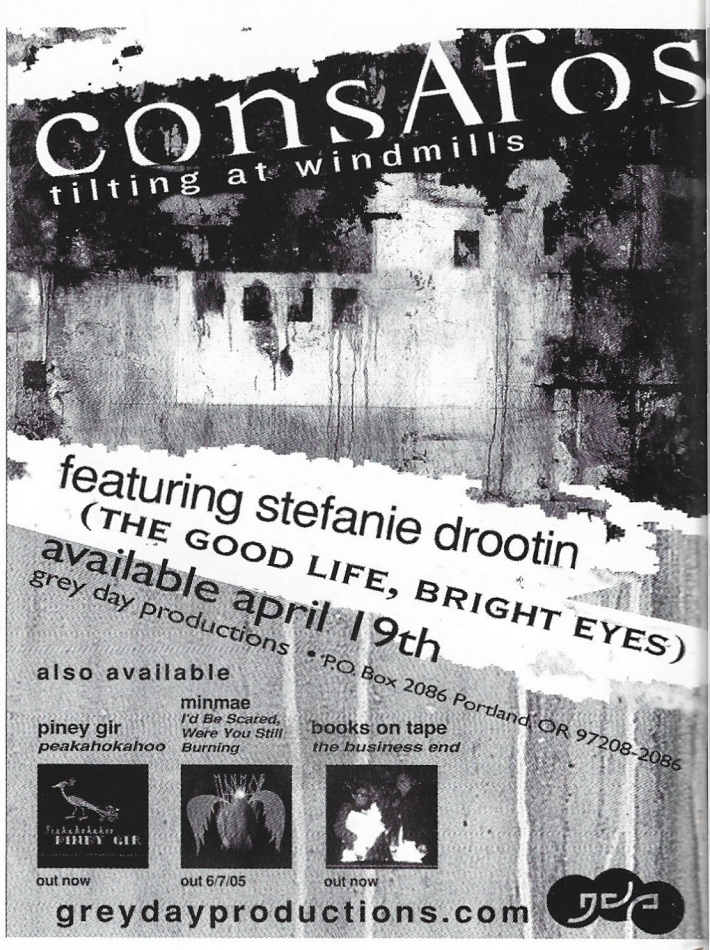
The best way to describe his **Quasimoto** project is as an adult cartoon; the artwork for *The Further Adventures Of Lord Quas* (Stones Throw) renders the character as a crudely drawn pig/dog, meant to send up hip hop's thug aesthetic. Jackson uses production tricks such as pitch-shifting to speed up his voice so it sounds as though Quasimoto is attempting to rap over hits of helium, similar to the tone struck by Prince's bizarre "Camille" character circa *Sign O' The Times*. During the course of any of the three Quasimoto records, our anti-hero wanders aimlessly from episode to episode, blunted beyond belief and using his eccentric argot to describe the clichéd hip-hop triathlon of drug use ("astro travelin'"), sex ("a game of javelin") and random violence ("smackin' dudes with bricks"). In the turn-of-the-20th-century minstrelsy tradition of Southern "race" records performed by whites passing as black, you might assume Quasimoto's bugged-out persona is really a conceptual conceit that finds Jackson performing in "crackface." Jackson cautions such analysis misrepresents his true intent.

"I just look at it as entertainment for the ears, a cartoon character actin' crazy," he says. "You're not supposed to take it too seriously. I recorded (2000 debut) *The Unseen* as a mess-around tape for myself. I didn't even expect that record to get out. Cats was callin' me Barry White because of my voice, so I pitched it up to make a CD for my Walkman."

In the five years since Quasimoto's debut, Jackson has maintained a breathtaking prolificacy. He's recording a Madvillain follow-up, planning a new Jaylib release and releasing his first solo album later this year (tentatively titled *King Of The Wigflip*); he also has a remix of Jay-Z's *Black Album* in the can. A good deal has changed within the hip-hop community during that time: Jay-Z has hung up his porkpie hat, the genre has rediscovered techno, and the uninspired variant called crunk has ruled the airwaves ever since. But Jackson senses a demand for his demented brand of comic-book rhyming, disoriented film dialogue and jazz-derived beats.

"People are brainwashed now by what's on the radio," he says derisively. "Quas is growin' up. As you see more things, you get in more episodes. I just wanted to kick back and make a crazy album, like the kind they used to do in the '60s before A&R took over. It's an R-rated movie." **[Stones Throw, www.stonesthrow.com]**

—Corey duBrowa



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A TALE OF TWIN CITIES

(continued from page 76)

Hill: Paul has complained a lot, building that us-against-them story. It makes good copy, but it's not really true. As much as it was ever possible at a major label, it was us *with* them—or trying to be. But it was hard for them to be with anyone except themselves. They locked the dressing-room door and wouldn't let any of us in.

Stinson: It wasn't like, "This is the big break or could be the thing that changes everything." I imagine it affected the other guys more than me, because I was just a kid. I wasn't even pondering a whole lot about what that meant, because I wasn't even old enough to sign the contract.

MacPherson: I thought it was going to be a really fun ride. They might self-destruct, but they might pull it off and it could be a great thing. We were all self-destructive at that point; it was everybody's big years for doing whatever you could. Drinking is very embedded in Minneapolis. It was almost something to be proud of.

Hill: The day the band came to meet prospective producers for *Pleased To Meet Me*, they arrived at our office, each of them looking like the Scarecrow from *The Wizard Of Oz*. Their sleeves were stuffed with straw and the discarded black carbons from old-fashioned credit-card receipts. They found the stuff in a box on the street. They went into our video lounge, locked the door and smeared the carbon ink all over the walls and threw the straw around. They broke all the LPs I had given them of the producers who were coming to see them. I got so pissed off, I locked the door of my office and wouldn't talk to them.

Buck: The Replacements' way of dealing with the world was adversarial, so it's not surprising they had an adversarial relationship with their record company. I love those guys, but they never took the easy road, making it hard for everyone around them. Not necessarily on purpose, but that's who they were.

Rabid: I dragged Steve Albini to a Replacements show. He didn't like them, but I said, "You *have* to see them." Of course, they ended up doing their crappy, inexcusable, boring all-covers set. They would make it through a verse or two of U2's "I Will Follow" and fall apart, then do another song they clearly didn't know. Or they'd wank off with "Heartbeat, It's A Love Beat" and bad top-40 songs or terrible versions of country songs like "Kansas City Star" that their roadie would sing. Albini walked out. I stayed, hoping they'd start playing their own songs or something they actually knew, but it would never happen. They'd just get drunker and drunker and care less and less, and the whole thing would be such a debacle. I'd seen it twice before, and it was only funny for about 10 minutes.

Finn: They were on *Saturday Night Live* in 1986. That was a big deal, like someone had anointed them as cool. Like they'd gone out and conquered something.

Hill: They had not made a deliberate plan to curse on the air. It just kind of happened spontaneously. Bob was wearing an ill-fitting jumpsuit with no underwear, and it split right up the backside during their performance. That whole evening was surreal. The *SNL* folks were known for being wild and crazy, but they shunned the Replacements all night and found nothing humorous about them.

Jesperson: Things did frequently get out of control. I wasn't an experienced manager, and there were a lot of things, as they became bigger, that I didn't know how to do or simply wasn't cut out for. At certain points in a band's rise, they may need someone to be tough, and I just wasn't a tough guy. Plus, we all abused substances, again to varying degrees, and that wasn't always appropriate for the manager. Not that it was always a good idea for the band, either, but that's another story.

Hill: As for Bob, people were worried about his behavior and his substance abuse, but it did take a while to understand the depth of his problem. At first, his unpredictability was part of his charm, but it became clear later he had a serious issue with bipolar disorder.

Westerberg: Bob just got out of hand. He would be outside in the alley trying to score drugs while we were onstage. When he was tipsy and wearing a dress, he was charming, but when he was just wasted, stark naked and had no clue at 180 decibels, it was like, "This ain't helping us at all."

Jesperson: I don't think Bob ever came to terms with the fact that Paul had become the leader. In the beginning, it was Bob's band. Even though they clearly wouldn't have been real contenders without Paul—and Bob knew that—he still resented him somewhat. When Paul started bringing in quieter, more thoughtful songs, Bob would say things like, "Save that for your solo album, Paul." That was the real beginning of the end for Bob in the band.

Keller: Bob had other problems that were never addressed personally or professionally. He had a hard life. It was a shame he couldn't stay in the band; I think they lost

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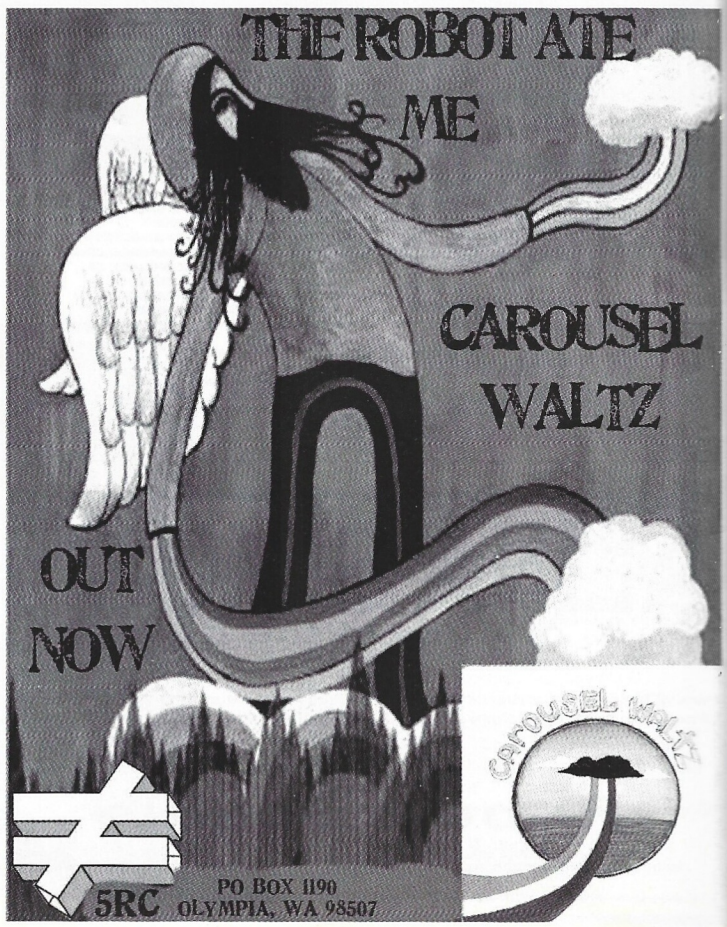

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an edge they never regained.

Westerberg: Bob went through treatment many times. I went a few weeks without drinking. I think Bob and I both tried and both failed.

Stinson: I really thought they were going to change, and I think they did, too, at least for a moment. I also got more involved with the nonsense. I only had Jesperson and my brother looking out for me, but my brother would get fucked up and I could've disappeared for all he could see; Peter as well. The sad part of it is that it forced me to grow up real fast and take care of myself. With the kind of role models I had, I'm fucking lucky to be alive.

Keller: I remember an interview I did with the Replacements. I drank some beers with them and somehow got on the subject of tragic artists like Flannery O'Connor. I point-blank asked Paul if the Replacements were a tragic rock band, because they had a self-destructive edge to them. I got a really startled look from Paul, like "Don't turn that mirror on me." I don't think I really got an answer. That was the first thing I thought of when Bob died: "Here's part of my answer."

Westerberg: I heard the coroner's report said, "He wore himself out." It was sad, but you knew it was coming. From the day I met him, he spent his days getting fucked up. That never changed. I really loved the son of a bitch. Any time he asked me to buy him a drink, I would empty my pockets for him. But I didn't like his guitar playing. I wanted to get rid of him from day one.

Dunlap: I was never asked to join the Replacements, I just kind of stumbled into it. I didn't go out of my way to try out. I was square with Bob. In his own way, he was never angry with me over it, but it is a heartbreaking part of that saga. It was doubly hard for me because I always did love him.

Jesperson: Paul said they needed me to step down, that he was unhappy with how things were going. He wanted to start swinging when he got mad and didn't want me in the way, catching any punches. I left the band in May 1986.

Fjelstad: That was surprising. Westerberg and Jesperson were such buddies. It was like two peas in a pod.

Ackerson: For me, things changed so much when the original lineup split and the antics started to seem a bit redundant. Ironically, though, that's about the same time that the rest of the world outside of Minneapolis started to notice the band.

Cole: When Bob got kicked out of the band, it was sort of a different era, a different phase. Then Chris left, and it was sort of a different band.

Stinson: Paul went from being a brother to me to being the singer to being "that guy." I try not to be negative.

Westerberg: During the *All Shook Down* tour, Tommy got as drunk as possible every night as a final "fuck you." There was one final moment that, if they ever make a Replacements movie, should be depicted. It was in Holland, and the promoter came in with the poster for the gig. It was a big picture of me, and it said, "Paul Westerberg And The Replacements." Tommy grabbed it and ripped it up, and that was the end of the Replacements.

Hill: The Mats seemed like a remarkable critique of the music business and how other artists shamelessly sought out fame: the artists who cooperated with the label, played very professional shows, made polished videos, meet-and-greeted press, radio, store owners and regional promo guys. The Mats made a mess of all of that and, consciously or not, pointed out the absurdity of so much of it: all the calculation and careerism that went into being an artist who was supposed to be spontaneous and wild and rebellious. At the same time, they seemed to crave the very success they mocked. They wanted you to pick up the tab, but they'd kick you in the ass while you were paying the bill.

Stinson: I still get people coming up to me and going, "Man, I saw you guys. You guys were so fucked up that you barely played your set, and it was the best show I ever saw." That always bums me out, because I really want people coming up to me going, "I saw you guys play, and when you did 'Bastards Of Young,' it fucking thrilled me to the bone." Nobody ever talks about the songs. I think Paul is an amazing fucking songwriter. I think the Replacements are as much about the songs as the drunken bullshit. That's kind of a bummer legacy. I'd rather have people listen to the record and realize that's what it was about. I've got no regrets about it. It's just like, "Damn! What about that one song that we did?" **M**

Interviews conducted by Jud Cost, Andrew Earles, Matthew Fritch, Matt Hickey, Steve Klinge, Eric T. Miller, David Olson, Hobart Rowland, Matt Ryan and Jonathan Valania.

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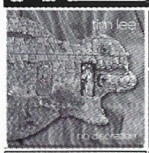

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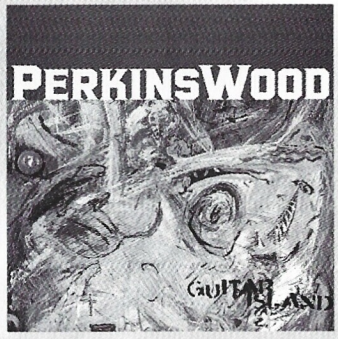

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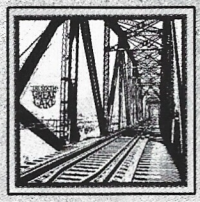

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Xenos

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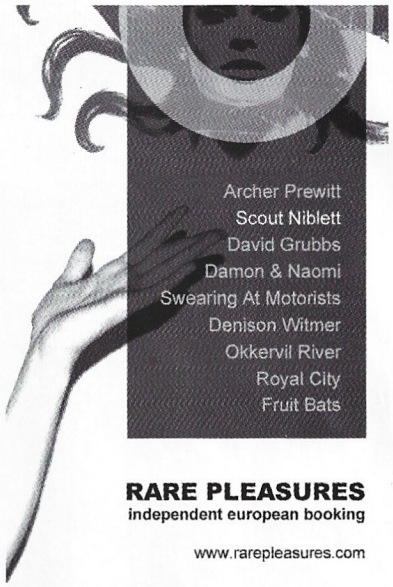

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THE BACK PAGE

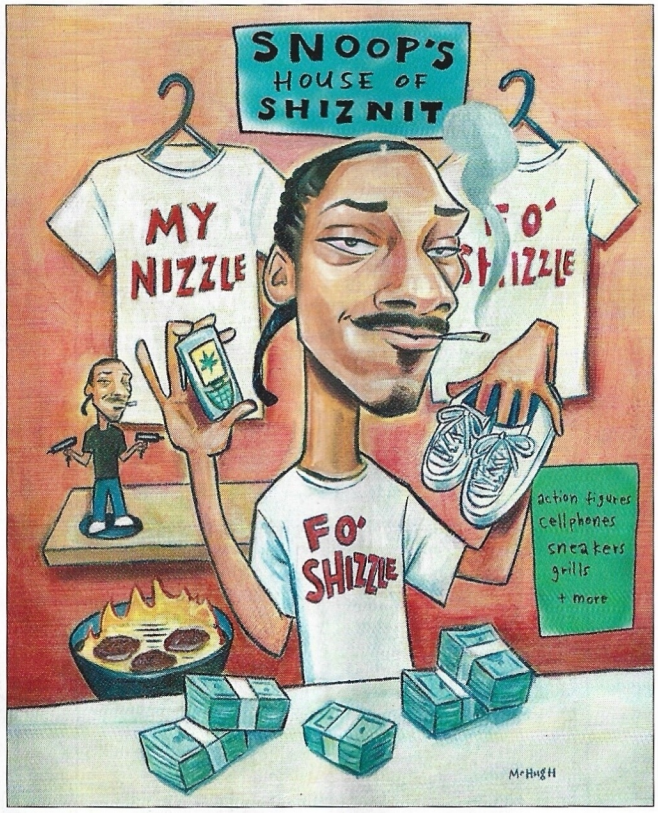
COOLER THAN JESUS

BY PHIL SHERIDAN

It might be stretching things just a little bit to compare Snoop Dogg to Jesus. Even if both men had posses. Even if the rapper's name is an anagram for "PG SON O' GOD." Even if the former Calvin Broadus has pulled off a resurrection damn near as impressive as ol' JC Himself. No, it would be foolish to bring Jesus into a discussion like this, especially now, when we're asked to believe He's calling the shots in the White House, Congress and, soon, the federal courts. Best to leave the Lord out of this one and play it safe. So let's just be conservative and compare Snoop to Martin Luther King Jr., Elvis Presley, Bob Marley and, oh, let's just throw in William Shakespeare.

Seriously.

There's no mystery here. I can tell you exactly when my fascination with Snoop began. It was the first time I saw the commercial for the cellphone/pager thing. You know the one. Snoop is doing laundry and needs some advice, so he starts a text-messaging chain that includes the likes of Paris Hilton, Molly Shannon and a little person who actually goes by the name of Wee Man.



Right around that time, I saw a commercial for AOL where some totally vanilla suburban couple is creating a sculpture with free CDs from the Internet service provider and suggests finishing it with a Snoop CD. At that moment, Snoop materializes in their foyer: "Now wait just one minizzle," he says, his eyes half shut.

That's all he had to do: Show up half-baked and say one line. And everyone got the joke. At that moment, I realized there was something really strange going on here. I mean, I'm not exactly Mr. Hip Hop, but I had formed an early sense of Snoop Dogg as the kind of character you wouldn't necessarily want turning up in your neat suburban foyer.

Check the list: Convicted drug dealer. Former Crip. Award-winning pornographer. Acquitted of murder (not because he wasn't involved, but because the jury accepted that his bodyguard acted in self-defense). Acknowledged smoker of prodigious amounts of marijuana. Just to be clear: I'm not making any moral judgments on any of these things. I'm just saying this isn't exactly the résumé you associate with corporate pitchmen.

This is where the Elvis comparison comes in. Forty years before Snoop, Elvis frightened parents with his rough edges and dangerous aura. He appealed to white teens by translating black music before it was possible for African-Americans to be heard directly. White America couldn't deal with sex and race at the same time. But the comparison goes further, because Elvis was quickly co-opted and turned into something easy for White America to digest. In a matter of a few years, he went from dangerous to harmless, from censored on *Ed Sullivan* to star of cheesy Hollywood crapola.

See a pattern?

Snoop and that first wave of hardcore gangsta rappers were freaking scary. A lot of those other guys are dead. Most of the survivors have been absorbed into the big entertainment machine. Ice Cube is an action-movie star. Dr. Dre is a mogul. Ice T has gone from singing about shooting cops to playing a cop in one of his many screen roles. Then there's Snoop, the former gang member and convict who somehow has become the cuddliest of them all.

According to a recent story in *Rolling Stone*, Snoop was working deals with "shoe companies, cellphone companies, barbecue-grill companies, clothing companies, satellite-radio companies, action-figure toy companies and movie studios." According to the same story, he's down to two ounces of weed a day. That would be the Marley comparison. Marley brought Rastafarianism to American music fans, but Snoop has created this persona of a lovable, laid-back stoner and inserted him into commercials for cell phones and Internet service providers.

None of this would be all that compelling if it weren't for the enormous impact Snoop was having on the very language we all share. And here, I'm going to ask you for a paragraph-long tangent.

When I was a kid, my mother taught me this odd little code that she and her five sisters used to employ when they were younger and didn't want anyone to know what they were saying. They called it "carny talk," and it involved inserting "iz" into the middle of words. Nizo shizit, a bunch of white girls in Philadelphia were doing this in the '50s, and I became aware of it in the early '70s. Imagine my surprise, then, when it suddenly became popular through African-American rappers from the West Coast. I have no idea how carny talk morphed into Snoop's "Fo' shizzle my nizzle," but there it is. Hell, one of last season's episodes of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* features a hooker teaching it to Larry David's stoned TV father, who points out the similarity to Yiddish.

Back in the day—and we're talking really old school here—Shakespeare captured spoken language in such a way that it entered the language permanently. It's a little early to be sure Snoop's version of English will last, but it sure as hell shows signs of digging in. Try Gizoogle.com instead of regular old Google sometime and you'll know what I mean. Or catch Fran Drescher dropping a "shizzle" in a commercial for Old Navy.

What does it all mean? Well, that's a hell of a good question. There's a part of every thinking person that hates to see challenges to the status quo get flipped and become just more of the Big Noise of pop culture. It happened to rock music, then happened again with punk rock; hell, you can hear Clash songs in commercials now. Henry Rollins is a film critic. And it certainly happened a long time ago to hip hop.

But there's another way of looking at Snoop's rise to critical mass in the mainstream culture. I guess this is where the Martin Luther King comparison comes in. Corporate America may be pulling the cultural fringes toward the center, but the reverse is happening, too. America gets pulled back a bit toward the fringe. It's true Elvis wasn't the same after going Hollywood, but it's just as true the country was never the same after Elvis.

If anything, Snoop is more subversive as a blunted, language-bending character text-messaging Burt Reynolds than he would be making hardcore rap music for a much smaller audience. Middle-aged, middle-class white Americans who never heard a single note of *The Chronic* or watched "Doggystyle" porn videos are completely at ease with the charming Snoop Dogg they've come to know.

What could be more revolutionary than a former crack dealer selling the products of major corporations on the most powerful medium in history? That's what King saw that more radical civil-rights leaders did not: You can be more effective by getting people to listen than by making them angry. People are listening to Snoop, that's fo' shizzle. Even if they have no real interest in whatever the hell he's talking about.

Bob Mould

Body of Song

Bob Mould returns to his signature guitar sound and songwriting style with BODY OF SONG. Mould's sound inspired a generation of post-hardcore punk rockers who helped create and define the alternative rock movement. Guest musicians include Brendan Canty (Fugazi), David Barbe (Sugar), Matt Hammon (1998 Bob Mould Band), and Amy Domingues (Garland Of Hours).

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